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CONTENTS

vii From the Editor

ix Announcement

ARTICLES

1 Irredeemable Stories? Native American Children's Literature
and the Radical Potential of Commercial Literary Forms
EMILY NAGIN

25 Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and the Indigenous Reinvention
of Young Adult Literature
MANDY SUHR-SYTSMA

53 The New People: Reading for Peoplehood in Métis Literatures
JENNIFER ADESE

80 Rewriting *Billie* and Asserting Rhetorical Sovereignty in Linda
Hogan's *Power*
HELEN MAKHDOUMIAN

BOOK REVIEWS

111 Aileen Moreton-Robinson. *The White Possessive:
Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*
MIRIAM BROWN SPIERS

115 Qwo-Li Driskill. *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and
Two-Spirit Memory*
LISA TATONETTI

118 Max Early. *Ears of Corn: Listen*
BRYCE STEVENSON

FROM THE EDITOR

Identities and Definitions

As I prepare this brief introduction, both the mainstream US press and various social media outlets remind me that we are participants in and witnesses to yet another period of heightened Indigenous activism across North America and around the planet. Most prominent in North America at this moment is the strong resistance organized by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their coalition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to block completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which threatens to violate sacred ancestral lands and to pollute life-giving waters. As in so many instances of Native protest, at the glaring center of the current conflict stands the perennial issue of whether or not settler governments and powerful multinational corporations will recognize Native individuals, communities, and nations as relevant stakeholders with relevant concerns and points of view—on their own lands and in their own lives. Yet again, Native individuals, communities, and nations are being forced not only to reassert their basic political sovereignty but also to reargue their basic worth and humanity.

The four essays that complete volume 28 of *SAIL* are thus especially timely in that they similarly grapple with the ongoing struggles of Native American individuals and communities in the United States and Canada to influence how their identities are defined, represented, deployed, and (often) controlled within dominant political, legal, social, educational, commercial, and popular discourses. Two of the four essays analyze these struggles over identity and definition in Native writing explicitly intended for children and young adults and thus through an examination of literary texts explicitly tied not only to the realities of the authors' Indigenous present but also to the possibilities of all our Indigenous futures. Emily Nagin opens the issue with an exploration of three

popular Native American young adult (YA) texts that span more than a century of the complicated politics of commercial publishing, adoption for classroom use, and broader reception: Francis La Flesche's *The Middle Five*, first published in 1900; Natachee Scott Momaday's *Owl in the Cedar Tree*, published in 1964; and Sherman Alexie's award-winning *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, published in 2007. Mandy Suhr-Sytsma then argues for including Jeannette Armstrong's acclaimed but understudied novel *Slash*, published for a teen audience in Canada in 1985, within the YA category as well. Together, Nagin and Suhr-Sytsma explore how a range of Native writers actively innovate the conventions of the YA genre while interrogating the politics of YA publishing through the lens of Indigenous sovereignty.

The remaining two essays broaden this investigation beyond texts explicitly aimed at young adult readers. Jennifer Adese takes up the problematic issue of defining—and controlling—Métis identities (also referred to as Michif and Halfbreed identities) within Métis literary texts in Canada. She combines compelling personal criticism with a close reading of Herb Belcourt's *Walking in the Woods* in order to develop a defiant argument against the persistent and persistently racialized discourse of Métis identity as a "mixed." Helen Makhdomian then demonstrates how the celebrated Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan rewrites the 1987 legal case of *United States v. James E. Billie* in her 1998 novel *Power* in order to imagine and assert Indigenous control over Indigenous identities and definitions when they matter most—that is, when they intersect the dominant culture's systems of political, juridical, and carceral power. Makhdomian's careful and compelling legal contextualization helps correct a tendency in recent scholarship to read Hogan's works within universalist ecocritical frameworks that erase the author's precise engagements with issues of Indigenous rights to land and resources, issues that are never independent of ongoing battles over Indigenous rights to definitional control.

Chadwick Allen

ANNOUNCEMENT

Please join the *SAIL* Editorial Board in congratulating Susan Bernardin, whose essay “Acorn Soup Is Good Food: L. Frank, *News from Native California*, and the Intersections of Literary and Visual Arts,” published in *SAIL* 27.3, has won the Native American Literature Symposium’s 2016 Beatrice Medicine Award for the best published academic article of the year. The annual Beatrice Medicine Awards are funded by the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University (reddcenter.byu.edu).

Irredeemable Stories?

Native American Children's Literature and
the Radical Potential of Commercial Literary Forms

EMILY NAGIN

In 2014 I came across Meghan Cox Gurdon's op-ed "Darkness Too Visible" and Sherman Alexie's rebuttal, "Why the Best Kids' Books Are Written in Blood." The articles, both of which appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, debate the necessity of what Cox Gurdon dubs "dark content" in young adult (YA) literature. Cox Gurdon laments dark content—which she defines as "kidnapping and pederasty and incest and brutal beatings"—and suggests YA novels be censored. Waxing sentimental, she writes that adolescence "is brief; it comes to each of us only once, so whether the debate [about content in YA] has raged for eons doesn't, on a personal level, really signify." Alexie fired back, arguing that when "cultural critics fret about 'ever-more-appalling' YA books . . . they are simply trying to protect their privileged notions of what literature is and should be." He went on to say that his YA novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* aims to give teens "weapons—in the form of words and ideas—that will help them fight their monsters." To Alexie, dark content is not only an important part of YA, it is essential.

I should say here that I'm in Alexie's camp. As a teen I sought out dark books because they felt honest in a way more wholesome literature did not. Now I work with teens and write fiction featuring teenage characters, so as a reader, writer, and educator I have an ongoing stake in this debate. I also have some pressing questions: What is my responsibility to my readers? Do the texts I teach and the stories I write limit the ideas I want to communicate?

These questions are essential because, contrary to Cox Gurdon's assertion, the history of YA *does* signify. Children's literature scholars such as Clare Bradford, Kent Baxter, and Roberta Seelinger Trites have pointed out that books for children and teens have historically proposed

worldviews and moral codes in service of white supremacist social-evolutionary theories. This is especially relevant to books featuring American Indian characters, because popular literature generally naturalizes colonialist notions of what it means to be American Indian. Policies engendered by these racist social-evolutionary theories still echo in how we talk and write about teens, especially minoritized teens, today. So to dismiss this history or, worse, to legitimate its ideology is an act of violence.

Some authors have attempted to use commercial forms to combat racist narratives, however: Francis La Flesche's *The Middle Five*, Natachee Scott Momaday's *Owl in the Cedar Tree*, and Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* all work to uproot stereotypes. Published at roughly fifty-year intervals, these books provide a broad overview of the way thinking about teens and American Indians has evolved over the course of the twentieth century. They are thematically similar, featuring Indian protagonists who negotiate complicated relationships with power. All three have been flagged as educational resources.¹ And they are all written in commercially viable, teen-focused forms: the boy book, the coming-of-age story, and the young adult novel. But as Clare Bradford points out, commercial books seeking to challenge the dominant discourse often walk "a fine line between subversion and an uneasy complicity," which can make their potential to enact change murky (*Unsettling Narratives* 29). So the fact that these books were written in commercially viable forms raises an important question: Is it possible to call attention to the injustices of a white supremacist system by employing a form that has historically naturalized that system?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ADOLESCENCE

We think of adolescence as the years between the ages of twelve and eighteen, when we encounter formative experiences determining what kind of adults we will become. Though this definition is deeply ingrained in our worldview, the concept of adolescence is relatively new. When the Industrial Revolution and the accompanying rise in urbanization produced higher enrollment rates in city high schools, a new segment of the population was born: teens who didn't have to work on farms with their families anymore and so gained a new, if limited, independence (Bax-

ter 3–4). In *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence*, Kent Baxter argues that this new demographic was considered criminal from the jump. People believed there was something fundamentally *wrong* with American youth.

In 1904 G. Stanley Hall published *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, a book attempting to articulate the root of the teen problem, apparently by casting a very wide net. Hall argues that as we age, we “recapitulate” the development of the human species. Adolescents are in the “savage” stage of development, which accounts for their supposed lack of respect for private property, tendency to form gangs or “tribes,” and promiscuous sexual behavior (Baxter 48–49; MacLeod 8). Hall’s recapitulation theory gave rise to the idea of “real” and “ideal” adolescents. “Real” adolescents are violent, sexual, and dangerous, while “ideal” adolescents are pinnacles of morality and self-control (Baxter 71). While Hall positioned adolescence as a natural developmental stage, he also made it clear that adults should intervene. Teens were capable of acquiring beneficial *and* detrimental traits, and whichever traits stuck would be passed on to the next generation.

Implicit in Hall’s characterization of adolescence as “savage” and adulthood as “civilized” is the image of ideal manhood as white, Christian, and capitalist (Baxter 80). Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School—the forerunner for other federally funded Indian boarding schools—was heavily influenced by Hall’s “age-inflected theories of social evolution,” which portrayed American Indians as “adolescents in adult size” (Baxter 80). Famous for vowing to *kill the Indian, save the man*, Pratt believed that the only way to save American Indians from extinction was to immerse them in European culture. In service of this immersion, Carlisle students were forbidden to speak any language other than English, and their Indian names were replaced with European American ones (Suhr-Sytsma 136). Carlisle’s stated goals were literacy education and vocational training, which students *did* receive, though “vocational training” often manifested as unpaid manual labor, and the English-only rule was typically enforced through physical abuse (Suhr-Sytsma 136; Atleo et al. 58).

The stakes of control were high at the turn of the century, and the tools for maintaining this control were broad and varied. One of them was commercial literature. Series like Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick* were

intended to “rehabilitate the implied reader, who was asked to emulate Alger’s model hero” (Baxter 7). But what if an author who is invested in upsetting an oppressive system appropriates its tools? Francis La Flesche’s autobiographical novel *The Middle Five* seems designed to do exactly this. Published in 1900, the book performs a quiet reversal of prevailing ideas about adolescents and American Indians, humanizing its Omaha characters and presenting the white ones as ignorant and inhumane.

AN ATTIRE FAMILIAR TO THE READER:

FRANCIS LA FLESCHÉ AND *THE MIDDLE FIVE*

In the preface to *The Middle Five*, La Flesche wrote,

I have chosen to write the story of my school-fellows . . . not because the influences of the school alter the qualities of the boys, but that they might appear . . . in an attire familiar to the reader. . . . [A]rticles that make up the dress of the Indian, are marks of savagery to the European, and he who wears them . . . finds it difficult to lay claim to a share in common human nature. (xv)

While this can be read as a straightforward statement of intent, the passage is not straightforward at all. When La Flesche was shopping *The Middle Five*, he was rejected by editors who felt the manuscript reflected “too little difference from *any* boy” when it should have depicted “the actual life of the Indian in his wilder state” (qtd. in Smith 593–94). When the book was finally published in 1900, La Flesche, perhaps as a dig at these editors, dedicated his novel to “The Universal Boy” and penned a preface that quietly indicts white readers incapable of seeing the humanity in nonwhite children.

Born in 1857 to Joseph Instamaza La Flesche (Ponca/French) and Ta-in-ne Elizabeth Esau (Omaha), Francis La Flesche is considered the first American Indian anthropologist (Smith 587). He grew up on the Omaha reservation and enrolled at the reservation Presbyterian boarding school in the late 1860s (Smith 585). Loosely based on La Flesche’s time at school, *The Middle Five* follows a group of preteen Omaha boys through one year at their reservation boarding school.

The Middle Five reads like a boy book, a popular nineteenth-century genre that grew out of literary realism (Crowley 385). Boy books are nar-

rated by adults embodying their childhood selves and “mainly have in common a reverence for boyhood, an autobiographical flavor . . . and a code of behavior alien to most adults” (Gribben 15). Boy book heroes tend to be orphans who form egalitarian friend groups or “tribes,” go on small-town adventures, and defeat bullies. The perspective is limited, the narrator’s hometown becoming “equivalent in dimensions and cultural activity to a metropolis” whose “legal, moral, and social codes . . . can never be fundamentally challenged” (Gribben 16). Boy book characters are static types, their essential traits remaining unchanged until the end of the story, when they are brought to the cusp of adulthood but do not cross over. We see the teenager in the offing, but we never meet him.²

Like classic boy book heroes, La Flesche’s protagonist, Frank, and his friends Brush, Edwin, Warren, and Lester form a gang called the Middle Five. They battle bullies and defend each other. Their personalities are fairly static (Brush is studious, Edwin tells stories, Warren and Lester are pranksters, Frank defends weaker boys), and the world of the novel is limited to the school and the Omaha reservation. Though the boys bend the rules of both places, they never break them outright, even when the rules are contradictory. Forming a gang with Brush is the closest Frank comes to outright transgression, because orphans are also not supposed to be in gangs, but Brush gets a pass because of his skill as a fighter.

La Flesche also paced *The Middle Five* like a boy book, ending when Frank is on the cusp of manhood. But Frank’s coming-of-age represents a departure from the typical boy book. Instead of graduating or getting a job, Frank grows up by coming to terms with death. La Flesche sets up Frank’s arc in the second chapter, when Frank asks his mother why people leave out food for the dead. Do ghosts get hungry? Frank’s mother explains that people leave food on graves not because they are giving the ghosts something to eat but because they miss their dead loved ones and want to feel connected to them. Frank fails “to grasp the meaning of her words, and [clings] to the commonplace idea [of ghosts] entertained by less thoughtful persons” (La Flesche 17–18). Near the end of the book, Brush falls ill and dies. On his deathbed, he makes Frank promise to take care of the rest of the gang and ensure they learn to read and write. Though Brush’s death dissolves the gang, Frank vows to keep his promise, finally understanding his mother’s words: Brush will not come back

as a vengeful ghost if Frank doesn't keep his word, but Frank will do so anyway out of respect for Brush's memory.

Boy books typically feature white protagonists, so the fact that the Middle Five are Indians not only crucially differentiates them from other boy book heroes but also attacks the social evolutionary theories popular at the time.³ The friend groups in boy books were often referred to as "tribes," the white boys in these groups linked to mythical Indians, wandering the forest (Crowley 386). Just before they come of age, boy book heroes abandon their tribes and "pass abruptly and irreversibly from the precivilized world of 'natural savagery' into the world of adult civilization" (Crowley 386). Frank and his friends are actual Omaha boys, not white boys playing Indian, and this complicates their relationship to the paradigm. Richard Henry Pratt would have expected Frank to abandon his "Indian-ness," as Pratt understood it, by abandoning his tribe/gang, but La Flesche uses Brush's death to cast doubt on the idea that one can kill the Indian to save the man (Smith 593). When Brush dies, he takes the man he would have been with him.

La Flesche also attacks the image of Indians as irrational and childish. When Frank goes home one weekend, he sees a group of Omaha boys throwing mud at a starving Winnebago boy. Frank doesn't participate, but he also doesn't intervene. Later, his father chastises him, saying, "By your presence you aided and encouraged those wicked boys. He who is present at wrong-doing, and lifts not a hand to prevent it, is as guilty as the wrong doers" (La Flesche 128). At the time, Indian parents were stereotyped as either "brutish Indians who hurt their children, [or] child-like Indians who exercise no discipline at all" (Suhr-Sytsma 151). Frank's patient but exacting father is clearly neither. It is Frank's white teacher, Grey Beard, who embodies childish violence. When a hapless young boy accidentally hits him with a clod of mud, Grey Beard seems to "lose all self-control," beating the little boy's hand "while the child writhed in pain, turned blue, and lost his breath" (La Flesche 138). The implicit question is, Who is more of a man? Can you really call Frank's compassionate, morally exacting father less evolved than Grey Beard?⁴ Placing an Indian character in the morally superior position would have been potent, even radical, at a time when comparisons between cultures "almost always resulted in the identification of what was lacking in Indian ways of knowing rather than the recognition of positive attributes of Indian culture" (Spack 3). In addition to offering a moral lesson,

Frank's father's speech indicts the apathetic white reader. Even if that reader is sympathetic, if he does nothing but ooze sympathy, he is perpetuating oppression.

La Flesche's decision to write a boy book was canny. In *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*, Louis Owens characterizes popular books by Indian authors—most notably, N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*—as Trojan-horse novels, books “in the mainstream tradition that nonetheless contain within [their shells] of [accepted literary] sophistication a thoroughly ‘Indian’ story and discourse” (69). La Flesche wrote a boy book voicing a sneaky critique of popular definitions of boyhood, manhood, and what it means to be Indian. In her essay “Francis La Flesche and the World of Letters,” Sherry L. Smith characterizes his strategy as one designed to “snare readership and keep it” by “mov[ing] delicately so as not to offend, affront, aggravate, or irritate. Only tangentially did he reveal the profound, yet ambivalent anger he felt about the fate of America's Indians. . . . Operating in a context in which policy makers became increasingly convinced that Indians lacked the intellectual wherewithal to survive . . . La Flesche chose his strategy carefully and wisely” (581). Writing a boy book allowed La Flesche to fold his critique of America's genocidal policy toward Indians into a nonthreatening package. (If that sounds like a challenge, it probably was.) The age of his characters gave him an advantage: preteens are old enough to go on exciting adventures, self-aware enough to reflect on their lives, but still fairly cute, less threatening than older teens or adults (Smith 593). Young characters also allow La Flesche to critique the association between children and Indians. On the surface, he seems to endorse the paternalism that spawned boarding schools, never questioning the value of literacy education and supporting the incorporation of certain aspects of European American culture into American Indian life (Smith 593). But La Flesche also mocks and criticizes school policies. As Smith points out, he makes fun of the insistence on renaming Indian children, especially after people like Philip Sheridan (592).

Just as writing a boy book was a strategic move, writing an autobiographical novel would have offered numerous advantages: autobiography adds factual clout, while fictionalizing the story provides a get-out-of-jail-free card should La Flesche cause offense. He was an Indian man building a career in the white establishment, and he undoubtedly had to tread carefully. Significantly, calling the book autobiogra-

phy allowed him to set it at a reservation boarding school during the late 1860s instead of a contemporary school more similar to Carlisle. This may have been a case of “write what you know,” or it might have been La Flesche’s way of avoiding dark and potentially alienating subject matter. I’m inclined to read it as a pedagogical suggestion, however. Though the Carlisle model would endure until the late 1960s, by 1900 off-reservation boarding schools were falling out of favor, their effectiveness at assimilating students increasingly called into question (Suhr-Sytsma 136; Grande 14).⁵ Maybe La Flesche was attempting to capitalize on the movement away from the Carlisle model by proposing another: schools located on the students’ home reservations, where they could be close to their families and the culture they’d been raised in. Setting the book on Frank’s reservation allows La Flesche to elucidate the value of Omaha culture while emphasizing the value of literacy education (Smith 592–93).

But who exactly was La Flesche trying to communicate these critiques and suggestions to? Although boy books were read by children, they were primarily intended for adults (Baxter 10). If the project of a children’s book is to teach a child how to become a grown-up, then boy books were geared toward grown men, because they “were not concerned with how the boy ultimately developed into a man. ‘Focusing on a limited period of time and deemphasizing the passage of time,’ [Marcia Jacobsen writes in her study of nineteenth-century boy books], ‘the boy book is not about growing up, but is instead about the meaning of boyhood for the adult author’” (Baxter 10–11). La Flesche was not trying to teach children about growing up. He resisted having lesson plans drawn up for *The Middle Five* and urged his college-age nephew to promote the book among his friends (Smith 594). His target readers were the people in power: white men nostalgic for their childhoods and potentially sympathetic to Indians. La Flesche knew his audience, and he achieved his goal: though he would never earn much in the way of royalties, *The Middle Five* enjoyed tremendous popularity and was praised by men like George Bird Grinnell and even Richard Henry Pratt (Smith 594).

But if Pratt liked *The Middle Five*, did he actually understand it? Or did he get caught up in the familiar form and miss the underlying critique?

*Imagine Yourself into Being:**Natachee Scott Momaday and Owl in the Cedar Tree*

In his 1976 memoir, *The Names*, N. Scott Momaday wrote that his mother, Natachee Scott Momaday, “began to see herself as Indian” when she was a young woman (25).⁶ Though her ancestors were mostly European American, her maternal great-grandmother was Cherokee, and Momaday writes that this “dim native heritage became a fascination and a cause for her . . . it became her. She imagined who she was. This act of imagination was . . . among the most important events of [her] early life” (*The Names* 25).

Momaday’s mother was born in 1913 in Fairview, Kentucky, and her given name was Mayme Natachee Scott, but by the time she was a teenager, she had begun going by Natachee, the name inherited from her great-grandmother (*The Names* 24–25). In 1929 she enrolled at the Haskell Institute, an Indian school in Lawrence, Kansas. She left to become a journalist, and in 1933, while visiting a Kiowa friend in Oklahoma, she met and married Alfred Morris Mammedaty, who later changed the name to Momaday (Momaday, *The Names* 19–38). Her son, Navarre Scott Momaday, was born in 1934. In 1936 the Momadays were hired to teach kindergarten through sixth grade at the Jemez Day School in Jemez Springs, New Mexico. They would remain at Jemez for the next twenty-five years (Bataille and Lisa 209–10). In addition to teaching, Momaday earned degrees from the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of New Mexico, gave lectures at NYU and Oxford, and won numerous prizes for her visual art (Bataille and Lisa 210). Her entry in *Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary* lists her as the author of at least three children’s books, as well as a classroom reader (Bataille and Lisa 210).

In 1964 Momaday published *Owl in the Cedar Tree*, her best-known children’s book. The story follows Haske, a Navajo boy who loves to draw. Haske lives on a reservation with his parents, Night Singer and Riding Woman; his little sister, Desbah; and their great-grandfather, Old Grandfather. When Haske’s wish to become a sand painter comes into conflict with his schooling, his identity is thrown into turmoil. Faced with constructing a life out of seemingly incompatible parts, he feels as if “a rope was tied to either arm and he was being pulled both ways at once” (Momaday, *Owl* 82).

It is interesting to compare *Owl in the Cedar Tree* to *The Middle Five*, in terms of both plot and historical position. Published in 1964, *Owl* came out as the first rumblings of American Indian involvement in the civil rights movement were taking place (Johansen 197).⁷ Though the Red Power movement did not gain real momentum until the late 1960s, activists had been pushing for self-determination, the affirmation of “American Indian identity and . . . reclaiming of . . . political, social, and economic” power for decades (Troy R. Johnson qtd. in Johansen 221). One of *Owl*’s central questions is whether Haske can really control his own future.

Plotwise, *Owl* and *The Middle Five* possess interesting similarities. As Frank and Haske move between school and home, they navigate conflicting, sometimes incompatible sets of rules and norms. Like Frank, Haske values school but also resents it. He loves the colored pencils available at school, but the road leading there is often impassible, and his embarrassment at having fallen behind makes him reluctant to go. Also like Frank, Haske grows up after the death of a loved one—Old Grandfather.

Unlike La Flesche, Momaday was writing for children. While La Flesche aligns adult readers with the text by using the first-person retrospective point of view (adult Frank is usually indistinguishable from his childhood self, but a nostalgic and gently mocking tone surfaces often enough to remind the reader that a grown-up is narrating), Momaday’s prose is never indulgent or mocking. Haske’s worries are taken seriously, his desires rendered with a lyricism that allows no room for condescension. Writing about Haske’s love for Night Wind, a horse Haske longs to own, Momaday writes, “When a boy wants something as much as Haske wanted the black horse, it hurts to talk about it. So he told no one. He just kept the secret in his heart” (*Owl* 2). Haske’s love of drawing is rendered with similar respect and poeticism: “His fingers fairly throbbed with the desire to draw. The feeling was so strong it was like being hungry all the time” (*Owl* 3). Gearing *Owl* toward children rather than adults suggests that Momaday had a project different from La Flesche’s. Instead of aligning herself with the people in power, Momaday was using literature to help a new generation shape itself.

In the 1920s the coming-of-age story supplanted the boy book as the go-to genre for depicting adolescence (Baxter 11). *Owl in the Cedar Tree* does not meet all the criteria for the typical coming-of-age story,

which follows an older teenage character, deemphasizes the role of parents, and focuses on the protagonist's growing sexuality / potential sexual relationships (Baxter 11). Haske's age is never given, but based on the illustrations and the reading level, he is probably between eight and eleven. There is no mention of his developing sexuality, and his parents play a central role in the plot. But *Owl* is not a boy book, either. Audience aside, Haske has no "gang" and no bullies to defeat, and crucially, his personality is not static. If boy books depict childhood as a period of innocent stasis, the coming-of-age story sees it as a steady process of change and growth (Baxter 11). Although Haske is younger than the typical hero in a coming-of-age story, he grows up dramatically over the course of the book, the process accelerating when Old Grandfather dies.

According to Kent Baxter, defining adolescence as a "process of becoming" can be another articulation of anxieties about teens and children, specifically who they will grow into (11). Coming-of-age stories were often used by their authors as "a way to both define a seeming threat and to provide a possible solution to this threat" (Baxter 11). So what kind of threat is Momaday defining? Who does she want Haske—and by extension her young readers—to become?

Old Grandfather is one potential threat. Haske's parents consistently warn him that Old Grandfather lives in the past and that Haske should take his advice with a certain degree of skepticism. The impracticality of Old Grandfather's beliefs is illustrated by his homelessness: believing that "when a person dies in a Hogan it must be burned," Old Grandfather set fire to his hogan after his wife died and now relies on friends and family for shelter (Momaday, *Owl* 19). Community members who share Old Grandfather's beliefs refuse him aid, fearing that he will die in their hogans. Haske's parents, who "each attended a Government Boarding School . . . [and] would not hold to the old superstitions," take Old Grandfather in (Momaday, *Owl* 19–20). The narrative simultaneously criticizes Old Grandfather's self-imposed homelessness and the lack of community support for him. If Haske is not willing to stay in school and "change with the changing times," the story intimates, he will suffer like Old Grandfather (Momaday, *Owl* 20). If this is Momaday's frame, then *Owl*'s lesson is that Old Grandfather's way of life must vanish if Haske is to thrive.

Indians who float free from history and vanish before they become inconvenient to colonial expansion are an old trope of commercial fic-

tion, dubbed the “absolute fake” by Gerald Vizenor (qtd. in Owens 13). The Vanishing Indian is a “doomed, tragic savage” who enacts “the process of vanishing” with his refusal to assimilate (Owens 82). In *Mixed-blood Messages*, Louis Owens lists other traits of commercial fiction featuring Indians, which include “wise elders, prayers to ‘mother earth,’” and an “Indian-looking” author photo on the jacket, included as visual proof of the book’s “authenticity” (12, 14). Owens describes these constructions as “a simulated Euramerican invention” designed to sell books to white readers by tacitly affirming white superiority (13).

Is this what *Owl in the Cedar Tree* is doing? The book includes several prayers to the natural world and a wise, if fallible, elder. The jacket flap features a large photo of Natachee Scott Momaday dressed in a blanket similar to the one Riding Woman wears in the illustrations. *Owl* has also been criticized for being ahistorical. After the 1993 reissue by the University of Nebraska Press, one reviewer wrote that while the book “provides a good deal of cultural information . . . the uninitiated reader cannot . . . place the story in its historical context” (Grant 111). Old Grandfather could be easily read as a Vanishing Indian, since he literally vanishes two-thirds of the way through the book. Knowing that Old Grandfather is dying, Haske promises to check on him after school. Old Grandfather discourages him, saying, “I shall not be here. I must go. Someone is coming for me, and I want to go” (Momaday, *Owl* 92). Haske goes looking for Old Grandfather anyway, but he has indeed vanished, leaving no body, no trace at all.

While it is possible to read *Owl in the Cedar Tree* as an assimilationist parable, doing so renders the book and its author a disservice. First, this reading relies on the assumption that Momaday set out to write for a specifically white audience. Although *Owl* shares traits with commercial novels, one respect in which I believe it differs is intended readership. Toni Morrison has argued that “the readers of all American fiction . . . have been positioned as white regardless of the actual race of the author” (qtd. in MacCann 186). If that is true, an author positioning her book to sell should direct it at a white readership. La Flesche adopted this strategy. While Momaday’s assumed reader has probably *not* grown up in conditions identical to Haske’s—she provides a descriptive definition of a hogan, which she wouldn’t need to do for a reader who lived in one—that reader is not necessarily a white child. Momaday dedicated much of her life to teaching at reservation day schools. Quite possibly,

she was responding to whitewashed children's books by writing a story featuring Indian characters for an Indian audience. *Owl's* reading level is "approximately grades 4–6," which fits the age range of Momaday's students (Grant 111). A Navajo protagonist might have been appealingly recognizable to many Indian children while still being different enough to capture the imagination. Students at reservation day schools would have been familiar, to varying degrees, with the challenges Haske faces in and out of school. Reading a book in which almost every character is Indian would have been appealing to Indian students used to absent or tokenized Native characters.⁸

There are no token Indian characters in *Owl*. Momaday positions her Navajo characters as the norm, the rest of the world as *outside/other*. This is in contrast to most commercial fiction, which positions Indian characters as *other*. In a discussion about his 1986 novel, *Fools Crow*, James Welch said that he wrote the world of his 1860s Blackfeet Indians "from the inside-out, because most . . . novels [featuring Indians] are written from the outside looking in. . . . I'm talking about camp life and ceremonial life, those day to day practical things they did to survive. . . . The white people are the real strangers. They're the threatening presence out there all the time" (qtd. in Owens 7). Like *Fools Crow*, *Owl in the Cedar Tree* focuses on the day-to-day practicalities of Haske's life. Prayers and ceremonies are carefully and reverently depicted, serving vital functions in the plot. When Old Grandfather is mauled by a bear, the community gathers at a sing to cure him. At the sing, Haske feels a profound connection to his community. His hogan "seemed to breathe the song. It did not sound like the voices of many people. It sounded like one great voice with many intonations. . . . [Haske] said within himself, 'It is good. It is beautiful. I am in my mother's hogan, and there is no world outside. There is . . . no yesterday or tomorrow. It is all here and now'" (Momaday, *Owl* 49). The security Haske feels when there is "no world outside . . . no yesterday or tomorrow" hints at the pressure the outside world usually exerts. The US government is never an explicitly threatening presence, but Haske's parents receive an aggressive letter "from Washington [that] must be obeyed" stating that "[e]very child . . . must attend school" (Momaday, *Owl* 52). Assimilationist pressures become apparent in his parents' insistence on change as a survival mechanism and Old Grandfather's adherence to tradition. The conflict between the older generations is ultimately driven by their reactions to

assimilationist policies like Termination, though this is never explicitly stated.

As the differences between Haske's parents and Old Grandfather demonstrate, *Owl* presents a range of ways one can "be" Navajo. Old Grandfather, with his close adherence to old practices, is at one end of the spectrum; Haske's parents, who are willing to discard some beliefs while embracing others, sit in the middle; and a character like Store Sitter, who happily eats bear meat even though Old Grandfather insists that bears house ancestral spirits, sits at the other. None of these characters are vilified for their choices. No one exists as "an index to the Euroamerican's lost 'mystical' self" (Owens 70). Rather, they serve as mirrors for Haske, who can use their examples to determine how he wants to live his life.⁹

If *Owl in the Cedar Tree* is designed to speak to American Indian children about crafting their own identities, then Momaday's project is in line with other writers working to promote self-determination. Author and activist Zitkala-Ša (Yankton Sioux), a contemporary of Francis La Flesche, was an important player in an earlier push for self-determination. She "believed that self-representation was a key component of self-determination . . . [and] made efforts to equip American Indian children with the tools they needed to represent their own histories, cultures, and experiences . . . [by] gaining cultural knowledge along with the ability to articulate that knowledge" (Suhr-Sytsma 159–60). Thirty years after Zitkala-Ša's death, self-determination manifested in the Red Power movement. The central fear in *Owl* is not that Haske will become like Old Grandfather but that his wants and aspirations will pass him by and his future will be delineated not by his own desires but by federal policy.¹⁰

The battle for Haske's future manifests in the choice between sand painting and becoming an artist. For most of the novel, these choices are set in opposition, though they both stem from the impulse to better his community and make a lasting impact. Sand painters significantly improve the mental and physical health of the community, but the images are impermanent. Pencil drawings last, but are they useful?

Haske resolves this conflict with the help of his teacher, Mrs. Smith. At the end of the novel, Mrs. Smith appears at Haske's hogan with a check for one hundred dollars, informing him that she entered one of his drawings in a competition, and it won first prize. Haske uses the

money to buy Night Wind, the horse he's been longing for. His victory is bittersweet, however: he wishes Old Grandfather were there to celebrate with him. Remembering Old Grandfather leads Haske to the realization that he "can keep the old ways which Old Grandfather loved so much by painting all the things he told me about. They will never change" (Momaday, *Owl* 106).

Haske's art becomes a vehicle for cultural preservation. Because of school, Haske has the tools to express himself and the opportunity for recognition. Because of Old Grandfather, he has a mission. Ultimately, Haske achieves self-determination through self-representation, and he can serve as a model to other children.

IRREDEEMABLE: SHERMAN ALEXIE AND
THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN

The same anxieties that surface around boy books and coming-of-age stories raise their heads in the discourse surrounding YA. Young adult novels are a high-stakes endeavor, as reactions to Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* illustrate. Alexie's novel met with tremendous commercial success and won the 2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, but it has also been banned from multiple school districts. An article in the *Huffington Post* cites numerous references to masturbation (Dicker), and *Reuters* describes parents in Idaho outraged by "profanity, racial epithets and anti-Christian rhetoric" (Zuckerman).

Although Alexie was an established writer before *Part-Time Indian's* 2007 publication, the *New York Times* heralded it as his "commercial breakthrough." The novel follows Junior, a Spokane fourteen-year-old who transfers from the reservation high school to a better-funded, all-white school in the neighboring town of Reardan. Although Junior's immediate family is supportive, his best friend, Rowdy, is furious that Junior has abandoned him, and the two develop a furious rivalry. Like Frank and Haske, Junior has an ambivalent relationship with his new high school, where he is the only Indian besides the mascot and, in an echo of Carlisle, goes by a different name from the one he uses at home. Being at Reardan makes him feel "like a magician slicing myself in half, with Junior living on the north side of the Spokane River and Arnold living on the south" (Alexie, *Absolutely* 61). Junior's adolescence is also

marked by intimate encounters with death: in the space of a year, his grandmother, sister, and father's best friend die violently. In the wake of their deaths, Junior wonders if his own survival is possible.

A realist young adult novel, *Part-Time Indian* is part of the generation of books succeeding the coming-of-age story.¹¹ Young adult novels are diffuse in their settings and structures, and any book written and marketed with adolescent audiences in mind is loosely classified as YA (Trites 7).¹² In *Disturbing the Universe, Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Seelinger Trites argues that in YA, maturity "is inevitably represented as being linked to what the adolescent has learned about power. Without experiencing gradations between power and powerlessness, the adolescent cannot grow" (x). Much of *Part-Time Indian* revolves around the ways Junior negotiates systems of power, and his decision to transfer to Reardan is predicated on the idea that power lies off the reservation.

The idea that one can only succeed in life by leaving the reservation has surfaced in Alexie's work before. His insistence, featured in his *Wall Street Journal* editorial, that he wrote *Part-Time Indian* for the "poverty-stricken, sexually and physically abused, self-loathing Native American teenager that I was" comes in contrast to his earlier statements about his ideal audience. Alexie has discussed his desire for a wide readership in numerous interviews, saying that, "demographically speaking, most of the fiction in this country is bought by middle class, college-educated white women. So that's who I'm writing for" (Nygren 162). Louis Owens problematizes Alexie's choice of audience in *Mixedblood Messages* (written, it should be noted, before the publication of *Part-Time Indian*), arguing that while Alexie postures as a critic of white supremacy and colonialism, his work actually panders to these systems by giving "Euro-american readers exactly what they have always wanted . . . Indians who are enacting, in one guise or another, the process of vanishing" (82). Owens argues that in books like *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven*, Alexie presents a world in which anything redeeming or hopeful about Native communities is absent, and "the reservation is a vaguely defined place where people live in cheap federal housing while drinking, playing basketball, feuding with one another, and dying self-destructive and often violent deaths" (71–72). Portraying reservations as sites of Indian self-destruction harks back to the Vanishing Indian trope: if the reservation community is self-

destructing, then colonialism isn't to blame, and white readers don't have to feel uncomfortable.

Many of these tropes about reservation life are visible in *Part-Time Indian*, which features basketball and self-destruction aplenty. Alcohol-related deaths abound: Junior's grandmother is run over by a drunk driver; his father's best friend is shot in the face over a bottle of wine; and his sister Mary and her husband die passed-out drunk in a trailer fire. Alexie underscores this cycle of self-destruction with Mary's boozy wake, during which Junior asks, "How do we honor the drunken death of a young married couple? HEY, LET'S GET DRUNK!" (*Absolutely* 212). Conditions are so bad that Junior begins referring to the reservation as a "death camp" (Alexie, *Absolutely* 216).

While Alexie makes it clear that the reservation system has its roots in genocide, *Part-Time Indian* complicates the notion that reservations are stripped of hope or potential. The first person to frame Junior's reservation as hopeless is Mr. P, Junior's teacher at the reservation high school. Mr. P confides that the school's mission is "kill the Indian to save the child" before urging Junior to transfer to Reardan, "where people have hope" (Alexie, *Absolutely* 35, 43). In "Not Exactly: Intertextual Identities and Risky Laughter in Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*," Adrienne Kertzner reads Mr. P as a "satirical version of Richard Henry Pratt" apologizing for the mission of the Carlisle Indian School (60). Kertzner sees Mr. P's apology as a triumphant moment, but this scene feels more ambivalent to me. The accompanying illustration depicts Junior as a priest to whom Mr. P is confessing, suggesting that his apology is less about helping Junior than absolving himself of his sins against generations of Indian children. When Mr. P informs Junior that his loved ones will kill him if he stays on the reservation, he is echoing Pratt's rhetoric, not negating it. Can we *really* believe everything Mr. P says if his frame of reference is so skewed? Though the reservation school is designed to "kill Indian culture," it is Reardan that makes Junior feel isolated and like "something less than less than Indian" (Alexie, *Absolutely* 35, 83). In the end, Mr. P is not entirely trustworthy. While his intentions are good, his insistence that Junior's loved ones will destroy him is cruel and ultimately false.

Framing the reservation as purely dysfunctional also ignores the multiple instances in which its residents form a loving and supportive community. Junior's grandmother's funeral is held on the football field

because so many people come to pay their respects. Noticing that his own parents come to all of his basketball games while his white teammates' families routinely fail to show up, Junior reflects that "my folks are pretty good. . . . I'm friends with some white kids, and I've never met their fathers. . . . Indians are screwed up, but we're really close to each other" (Alexie, *Absolutely* 159–60). Junior is ambivalent about his community, but love and pride are part of his ambivalence.

Rowdy's arc also underscores the potential for hope on the reservation. For most of the novel, Rowdy is positioned as Junior's foil. Both boys are deeply angry, but Junior's anger motivates him to be productive, while Rowdy's anger is destructive. When Junior tells Rowdy he is transferring, Rowdy responds by punching Junior, sobbing, then screaming in fury at the sight of his own tears (Alexie, *Absolutely* 52). At various points over the course of the novel, Junior laments that Rowdy is "never going to change" (Alexie, *Absolutely* 228).

Yet Rowdy is arguably the character who changes most. In the final chapter, Rowdy comes over to Junior's house and invites him to play basketball, marking the first civil interaction the boys have had in months. Junior once again tries to get Rowdy to transfer, and while Rowdy refuses, he does so calmly. Rowdy's transformation takes place without his ever leaving the reservation. This helps Junior understand that while leaving is the right thing for him, staying will not doom his friend.

Presenting a portrait of reservation life that moves between despair and hope is an example of Mikhail Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse (Cadden 147). In "The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel," Mike Cadden writes that "double-voiced discourse . . . achieves ideological parity . . . [by] provid[ing] the reader with a host of . . . specifics that in their totality enable the reader to keep any single conclusion in doubt" (147). Achieving double-voiced discourse is challenging, especially in YA, which encourages a compelling first-person point of view (Cadden 146). Cadden cautions that when "authors provide the young adult reader with an unassailable, seductive, and singular voice, they may be sacrificing" nuance, because the more compelling the voice, the more likely a young reader is to take the narrator's truth as gospel (153). Cadden identifies three ways double-voiced discourse can be achieved: unreliable narrators, rotating points of view, and a compelling single narrator who presents a "counter cultural" perspective implicitly at odds with the dominant discourse (149–53). Alexie employs this last

option in *Part-Time Indian*. Junior's voice is hilarious and compelling, and he questions and contradicts himself constantly. One of the clearest instances of double-voiced discourse comes after Junior visits his loved ones' graves and experiences a moment of deep despair about his own future. The next chapter opens with the line "The reservation was beautiful" and Junior and Rowdy's reconciliation (Alexie, *Absolutely* 219). By juxtaposing the graveyard scene with Junior and Rowdy's newfound hope, Alexie allows a multifaceted image of the reservation to emerge, one housing a sad, brutal history but also a supportive community.

IN CONCLUSION: NOW WHAT?

What does all this labor and subtlety add up to? Louis Owens cautions that when an author writes commercial fiction, "a very real danger . . . is that of consciously or unconsciously using Eurocentric theory merely as a way of legitimizing his or her voice—picking up the master's tools not to dismantle the master's house but simply to prove that we are tool-using creatures just like him and therefore worthy of intellectual recognition" (53). Clare Bradford offers a similar caution in *Unsettling Narratives*, writing that "children's texts are caught between . . . dominant discourses . . . and the counter-discourses that seek to undermine them" and that these conflicting pressures can create books trapped between subversion and complicity (24). Bradford goes on to say that readers are also responsible for how a text is understood: books by Indigenous authors should be read "with due attention to their difference . . . rather than from within the assumptions of Western culture and textual practices" (227). Kertzner also puts the onus on readers, arguing that if some fail to see the protest couched in the story, these "failures highlight problems . . . in our reading practices and what we do once we have read the story. One [book] cannot make a difference, but a community of readers might be able to" (72). But even if meaning is partially shaped by the reader, the author is responsible for seeding that meaning into the text. If readers don't notice the soldiers in your Trojan horse, do you have a weapon or a nice statue?

To my thinking, you still have a weapon. Pratt probably missed the critique in *The Middle Five*, but as Smith points out, the general resistance La Flesche met with while shopping it indicates that many readers *did* recognize its subversiveness (593–94). Though *Owl in the Cedar Tree*

went through a second printing in 1975 and was reissued by the University of Nebraska Press in the 1990s, my copy, the 1975 edition purchased online from the Cleveland Public Library, was last checked out on September 15, 1977, indicating that (at least in Cleveland) it did not enjoy huge commercial success. The extreme reactions to Alexie's novel imply fear of cultural assumptions being challenged. In the end, "the novel, like all stories . . . must be made and remade by the reader" (Owens 22). Some readers may not recognize that La Flesche put the lie to Indian savagery, that Momaday was deeply invested in self-determination, and that Alexie presents a reservation community that is far from vanishing. But even if these readers are not affected by the soldiers in the hollow horse, some are, and those readers can put the resistance within the text to use. In this way, commercial books can respond to the political climates in which they are produced, imbuing forms intended to bolster systems of oppression with the potential to provide disenfranchised readers with tools of resistance.

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NOTES

1. *Oyate Publications* includes these three books on its recommended reading lists, and Debbie Reese has written reviews and blog posts on *Part-Time Indian* and *The Middle Five*.

2. See John W. Crowley's "Little Women and the Boy-Book" and Alan Gribben's "Manipulating a Genre: 'Huckleberry Finn' as Boy Book" for a more detailed analysis of the genre.

3. Boy books are a subset of a larger category of book called the *school story*. Boy books are addressed primarily to adults, while school stories are generally intended for children. Both Roberta Seelinger Trites and Beverly Lyon Clark have written about the power of school stories to affirm and challenge the social order. In *Disturbing the Universe*, Trites writes that school stories often “conclude with an affirmation of the school’s purpose in training young people to take their place in the . . . social order. . . . [S]chools serve as an institutional setting in which the protagonist can learn to accept her or his role as a member of other institutions” (32). When the main characters are white and male, they are being trained for ascendancy, and the school is cast in a positive light. In her book *Regendering the School Story*, Beverly Lyon Clark argues that it is possible to “redress the genre by redressing,” bringing out subtleties and ambivalences about school by writing about female characters (19). The ambivalence La Flesche reveals by playing with race in *The Middle Five* is different from that thrown into relief by a specifically gendered lens, but his project is similar: once you replace European American boys with American Indian ones, you are left with a story that necessarily troubles the status quo and the role of schools in supporting it.

4. Like La Flesche, writer and activist Zitkala-Ša worked to flip the script by portraying Indians as better, more patient parents. She was producing commercial writing around the same time as La Flesche, much of it attacking the boarding school system, though she was far more explicitly critical. In 1900 she published a series of stories in the *Atlantic Monthly* designed to exploit and “revise the Euro-American figure of the romantic child in order to advance her agenda of American Indian self-determination” (Suhr-Sytsma 138). Like La Flesche, Zitkala-Ša was addressing a “largely white middle to upper middle class, reform minded audience that was heavily invested in the romantic childhood ideal[,] . . . the romanticization of Indians, and the conflation” of children and Indians (Suhr-Sytsma 138). Indian parents, Zitkala-Ša wrote, were better at raising their children according to the romantic ideal, and this made separating families not only tragic but immoral (Suhr-Sytsma 139–42). Mandy Suhr-Sytsma provides an in-depth analysis of this strategy in her article “Spirits from Another Realm, Activists in Their Own Right: The Figure of the Yankton/Romantic Child in Zitkala-Ša’s Work.”

5. In 1906 Francis Leupp, the commissioner of Indian Affairs, began to advocate for Indian children to attend public school with an eye toward saving money and immersing them in mostly white classrooms in the hope that they would learn to “think white” (US House of Representatives, qtd. in Grande 15).

6. Natachee Scott Momaday is mostly known for being N. Scott Momaday’s mother. I was hesitant to begin her biography by discussing him, because Natachee Scott Momaday did more than raise a brilliant son: she was a writer, artist, and celebrated educator in her own right. Yet in trying to find information about her career, I wasn’t able to come up with much. Google “Natachee Scott Momaday” or look her up on *JSTOR*, and you’ll mostly find articles about her son. In order to remedy this slightly, I have included a more detailed biography for her than I have for La Flesche and Alexie, whose lives and accomplishments are readily available in print.

7. Though many credit the American Indian Movement (AIM) with originating the Red Power movement in the late 1960s, “Bradley G. Shreve offers a compelling case that . . . activism began during the late 1950s, most notably in the southwest” among college-educated American Indians at schools like the University of New Mexico and BYU (Johansen 197). In 1959 these students formed the Regional Indian Youth Council, which expanded to become the National Indian Youth Council in 1961 (Johansen 197). An organization in which women formed the “backbone” and fueled much of the protest and direct action, NIYC is credited with being the first group to use the phrase “Red Power” (Johansen 197).

8. In “Contesting Ideology in Children’s Book Reviewing,” Debbie Reese lists the three most common American Indian stereotypes appearing in children’s literature: “the aggressive savage [who] appears in books about the western frontier where bloodthirsty Indians attack innocent settlers for no apparent reason[;] . . . the romantic, or noble Indian [who] is able to communicate with birds, animals, rocks, and trees”; and “a non-Native child or animal” dressed as an Indian (39). Reese charts the emotional impact of these images on her then-kindergarten-age daughter, describing the tantrums her daughter threw after non-Indian classmates refused to recognize her as Indian because she did not conform to the way Indians looked and acted in these children’s books (38–49).

9. Jim Charles’s article “Elders as Teachers for Youth in American Indian Children’s Literature” provides a more detailed analysis of the ways older characters, particularly grandparents, guide younger characters in *Owl in the Cedar Tree* and N. Scott Momaday’s *Circle of Wonder*. Charles argues that “both works suggest that young people have a great deal to learn about life from elders, lessons that lead to the development of better adjusted personalities and better integrated senses of identity” (59).

10. In a 1967 speech, NIYC leader Clyde Warrior said, “We are not allowed to make those basic human choices and decisions about our personal life and about the destiny of our communities that are the mark of free, mature people. We sit on our front porches and in our yards and the world and our lives in it pass us by without our . . . aspirations having any effect” (qtd. in Johansen 198).

11. There is some debate about when YA was originally conceived, with dates ranging from the early 1940s to the late 1960s, but S. E. Hinton’s 1967 realist novel *The Outsiders* is widely credited with the inception of YA (Baxter 14).

12. Because the range of stories in any YA section of the bookstore or library is so broad—ranging from postapocalyptic adventure to paranormal romance to realism, YA is classified as a marketing category rather than a genre.

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Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and the Indigenous Reinvention of Young Adult Literature

MANDY SUHR-SYTSMA

In November 2007 Sherman Alexie won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature with his novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. This event might have prompted scholars to attend to other Indigenous-authored young adult (YA) texts and to examine the possibilities of the YA genre for Indigenous writers. Yet, several years after *True Diary*'s debut, this area of scholarship remains scant. In fact, there are currently few articles and no book-length studies exclusively devoted to Indigenous-authored YA literature. Scholars, moreover, have not yet substantially explored questions about what Indigenous authors have to offer to the YA genre or what the genre has to offer to Indigenous literature. This essay, along with the larger project from which it is drawn, begins remedying these oversights.

My work builds on that of Doris Seale, Beverly Slapin, Paulette Molin, Clare Bradford, and Debbie Reese. These scholars provide broad analytical surveys of texts by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous authors who represent Indigenous characters in books for young readers.¹ By critiquing stereotypes and colonialist perspectives in texts by non-Native writers—including award-winning texts commonly integrated into school curricula—and by promoting texts that offer accurate nuanced representations of Native people, these scholars make crucial contributions for K–12 education and popular culture, as well as for Children's/YA literary studies. By focusing exclusively on Native-authored young adult texts and theorizing their unique approach to Native sovereignty and to the YA genre, I aim to move this area of study into a more fully realized subfield of both Indigenous studies and children's/YA literary studies.

READING SLASH AS YA

Much ink has been spilled in debates over the definition of young adult literature. The American Library Association (ALA) defines “adolescent literature” as encompassing three categories, which Sheila Schwartz summarizes as “Books Written Specifically for Adolescents,” “Books Written for General Trade Market Which Have Adolescent Heroes and Heroines,” and “General Books of Interest to Young Adults” (Schwartz qtd. in Trites, *Disturbing* 7). While recognizing that other scholars use the YA label for texts that match any of the ALA’s criteria for adolescent literature, Roberta Trites, a leading scholar in the field, limits the young adult literature designation to texts specifically targeting adolescents (*Disturbing* 7; “Introduction” 2–3). As Trites explains in her landmark study *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, literary historians mark the emergence of YA literature as a distinctive genre in the mid-twentieth century: in 1942 with the publication of *Seventeenth Summer*, in 1951 with *The Catcher in the Rye*, and in 1967 with *The Outsiders* (9). While Trites and other critics recognize the market-driven subjective nature of the YA label—and, to a certain extent, the category of “adolescence” itself—they also identify common characteristics of texts in the genre: these works tend to represent the latest speech patterns and consumer trends, they inevitably face censorship as a result of portraying realistic adolescent behavior, and they focus on young characters who rebel and mature as they come of age (Hunt 5–6; Trites, *Disturbing* 9–20). Trites makes an influential case in *Disturbing the Universe* that “Young Adult literature has exploded as an institution in the postmodern era because although it affirms modernity’s belief in the power of the individual . . . it very self-consciously problematizes the relationship of the individual to the institutions that construct her or his subjectivity” (20). YA novels thus stand apart from both adult and children’s texts, Trites argues, through their emphasis on power negotiations between individuals and social institutions even more so than through their focus on adolescent growth (*Disturbing* 20).

Earlier Indigenous writers—from E. Pauline Johnson and Charles Alexander (Ohiyesa) Eastman to D’Arcy McNickle and Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve—certainly published texts that appealed to young adults, but Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong’s 1985 *Slash* was the first novel by an American Indian or Canadian Aboriginal author written

expressly for a teen readership and thereby falling under Trites's narrow definition of YA literature. *Slash* was followed by several titles in the 1990s and early 2000s that engaged YA conventions while resting on either the middle-grade/YA or adult/YA line. Cynthia Leitich Smith's *Rain Is Not My Indian Name* (2001) and several titles by Joseph Bruchac, including *The Heart of a Chief* (1998) and *Skeleton Man* (2000), are examples of the former. Some of the many titles in the latter category include Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* (1993), Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995), Richard Van Camp's *The Lesser Blessed* (1996), Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water* (1999), and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000). We continue to see numerous middle-grade texts, like Tim Tingle's *How I Became A Ghost* (2015) and Joseph Marshall III's *In the Footsteps of Crazy Horse* (2015), and adult texts, like Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* (2012) and Erika Wurth's *Crazy Horse's Girlfriend* (2014) that carry cross-over appeal for adolescent readers. At the same time, since the 2007 publication of Alexie's *True Diary*, we have also seen a burst of solidly YA titles, including, in Canada, Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel* (2007) and David Alexander Robertson and Scott B. Henderson's four-part graphic novel *7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga* (2012) and, in the United States, Eric Gansworth's *If I Ever Get Out of Here* (2013), Joseph Bruchac's *Killer of Enemies* (2013), and Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel's *Wabanaki Blues* (2015). The texts listed here provide a sampling of Indigenous YA literature; a comprehensive overview is well beyond the scope of this essay.

While my larger project engages a range of Indigenous young adult texts, including many of those listed above, this essay focuses on *Slash*, an underappreciated novel that negotiates YA genre expectations and post-Red Power era understandings of Indigenous self-determination in ways that reverberate across much Indigenous YA literature. Highlighting author Jeannette Armstrong's Canadian context, Craig Womack characterizes *Slash* as "a 'Red Power novel' about the sixties and seventies" and finds it "striking" that no equivalent text emerged in the United States ("Theorizing" 400-01). *Slash* indeed provides a multifaceted treatment of Red Power and its aftermath through the lens of its protagonist/narrator's experiences and reflections. This character, Tommy "Slash" Kelsket, describes his involvement in Red Power movement initiatives across Canada and the United States.² Tommy's personal development parallels historical shifts in sovereignty activism as he moves from a position based

in confrontation to one based in internal community building. Having earlier been estranged from his Okanagan community, in the second part of the novel he experiences an intense spiritual, cultural, and relational reintegration. This reintegration, coupled with numerous conversations with other Indigenous individuals, leads Tommy to part ways with some activists, including his own wife, Maeg, who, in the early 1980s, advocated for Aboriginal peoples' inclusion in talks surrounding the formation of Canada's new constitution. Instead, Tommy takes a position of total Indigenous autonomy and seeks to direct attention toward the renewing of his Okanagan community from within.

While I agree with Womack that scholars—especially those based in the United States—ought to give *Slash* more attention as a groundbreaking movement novel, I contend that the novel's equally groundbreaking young adult status likewise merits greater engagement (personal conversation). Armstrong created *Slash* as part of the Okanagan Indian Curriculum Project (OICP) for use in British Columbia high school history courses and has frequently discussed her goal of reaching an adolescent audience with the novel.³ The book went through ten printings between 1985 and 2008, reaching a large general audience in addition to significant swaths of high school and college students in both literature and history courses (Armstrong, "Image" 145). Despite the novel's explicit targeting of teen readers and its engagement with YA genre conventions, previous scholarship has failed even to acknowledge *Slash* as a YA text. Virginie Alba, Clare Bradford, Noel Elizabeth Currie, Matthew Green, and Katja Sarkowsky are among those critics who overlook *Slash's* youth audience and curricular context. Barbara Hodne and Manina Jones criticize these other scholars for ignoring *Slash's* didactic aims toward its juvenile audience, but even they do not identify *Slash* specifically as young adult literature nor discuss it in relation to that genre.

Reading *Slash* as a YA text can benefit scholarship in Native studies and in children's/YA literary studies in several ways. Armstrong fought hard to ensure Indigenous authorship for *Slash* and other OICP texts, a struggle that can inform ongoing conversations scholars are having and need to have about Indigenous sovereignty in the publishing world ("Jeannette Armstrong" 121–24; interview with Lutz 27–29). These conversations are especially important in the realm of children's and YA literature, where non-Native authors' often problematic representations continue to dominate, promoted by publishers, librarians, and educa-

tors despite the substantial critiques offered by Seale, Slapin, Molin, Bradford, Reese, and others.⁴ While I could (and I hope others will) further examine *Slash* in relation to concerns about authorship, publishing, and distribution in children's/YA literature, the remainder of this essay focuses on two additional lines of analysis. First, I argue that *Slash* expands the possibilities of the YA genre through its revisionary engagement with YA conventions, especially those concerning power dynamics. Second, I contend that *Slash*'s engagement with those conventions impacts its vision for sovereignty, a vision that adds important nuances for contemporary conceptualizations of self-determination and for the nationalism versus cosmopolitanism debates that have dominated Native literary studies for the last two decades.

SLASH AND THE POWER DYNAMICS OF YA LITERATURE

Scholars of young adult literature characterize the genre as often representing as well as enacting a power dynamic by which young individuals are repressed by the institutions of their societies. As Roberta Trites observes, while YA texts are known for their depiction of rebellious teenagers, they generally end with the halting or at least tempering of these characters' rebellion. "Adolescents do not achieve maturity in a YA novel," Trites explains, "until they have reconciled themselves to the power entailed in the social institutions with which they must interact to survive" (*Disturbing* 20). Trites and other scholars maintain, moreover, that most YA texts depict adolescent protagonists as experiencing repression and the loss of individual agency as a result of that reconciliation (*Disturbing* 7–8, 34, 52; McCallum 71). In the more optimistic of these narratives, Trites explains, protagonists feel satisfied about reconciling themselves with their societies because of their hope that the societies will improve thanks to the protagonists' own models of self-improvement (*Twain* 143–44). In the less optimistic texts, protagonists become disillusioned about their ability to challenge the inevitable power of their societies' institutions, so they grudgingly or cynically accept that power and their place in society (Trites, *Disturbing* 16–20). In her book *Death, Gender, and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature*, Kathryn James joins Trites in arguing that even those YA texts that most strongly resist dominant social norms typically end up simultaneously reinforcing them (73–111).

YA literary studies scholars have attended not only to the power dynamics represented in YA texts but also to those operating in the relationship between young readers and the adults who produce and disseminate the texts. Like the power dynamics represented in YA literature, scholars generally characterize these dynamics as repressive, asserting that adult authors frequently use their narrative power to manipulate young readers into subject positions deemed appropriate by the author and his or her society (Trites, *Disturbing* 69–83; James 73–111; Cadden 146). In his seminal article “The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel,” Mike Cadden argues that adult authors frequently use their narrative position—usually via a first-person adolescent narrative voice—to disguise, manipulate, and abuse their authority over young readers (146). Pretending, via their narration, that they are just like the teens reading their books, adult authors mask the age-based power hierarchy inevitably at play in their work. Moreover, other adults in positions of power—such as publishers, educators, librarians, and members of the media—often further repress young adult readers by packaging YA texts with proscribed interpretive frameworks that limit readers’ agency.

Like most YA texts, *Slash* focuses on power dynamics at play between a young protagonist and the social institutions that impact his life. The novel follows one of the most common conventions of YA literature as it traces a character’s movement from estrangement to reintegration with his community. *Slash* stands apart, however, through its representation of Tommy as being personally empowered rather than disempowered through his reintegration with his Okanagan community. The novel also dramatically diverges from other YA works by depicting this reintegration not as marking the end or the taming of rebellion but rather as invigorating an entire community’s rebellion against colonialism. Finally, in addition to complicating the power dynamics typically represented within YA texts through an Indigenous narrative voice that is simultaneously self-questioning and strong, fallible and privileged, *Slash* troubles the common understanding in YA literary studies that the oppressive power dynamics at play between authoritative writers and vulnerable readers can only be countered via multiplicity and relativism.

"I HAD NEVER FELT SO STRONG":

SLASH'S PORTRAYAL OF INDIVIDUAL/COMMUNITY

Power Dynamics

In terms of his Okanagan community, Tommy largely follows the pattern characteristic of YA protagonists as he moves from selfishness, rebellion, and estrangement to responsibility, reconciliation, and reintegration. He initially rejects the institutions of his Okanagan community not only by physically moving away but also by engaging in activities that disregard Okanagan values: using drugs, having a chauvinistic attitude about his involvement with Red Power, and refusing to participate in Okanagan spiritual practices. As a result, he feels "lonely and left out," "like a stranger" to his family and home community until he realizes his need to learn "what [he] really was, as an Indian" (Armstrong, *Slash* 179–80, 196–99).

Tommy's turning point from estrangement to reintegration comes during his stay at a camp dedicated to reconnecting Indian young people with traditional spirituality. His camp experience, coupled with his dialogue with other Indigenous people, leads Tommy to reinvest in his Okanagan community. He describes his revelation at the camp: "I learned that, being an Indian, I could never be a person only to myself. I was part of all the rest of the people. I was responsible to that" (Armstrong, *Slash* 202–03). Tommy returns home and immediately feels more connected to his family, community, and homeland than he has since childhood. "I knew I was home, really home," he writes, "and my land welcomed me" (206). The Okanagan have a deep understanding of their land as Mother. Tommy, then, feels welcomed not only by his biological family but also by this Mother of his entire Okanagan community.⁵ Tommy's renewed sense of connection also entails a new sense of responsibility, which Tommy practices first by helping his father heal after a heart attack and then by throwing himself into work with his local community (206–08). To employ Trites's terms, by the end of the novel, Tommy has fully "reconciled" himself to the traditional institutions of his Okanagan society.

While Tommy follows a common YA pattern of reintegration, the fact that he experiences personal empowerment through his reintegration cuts against the grain of most YA texts and scholarly discussions of

power in the genre. In *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction*, Robyn McCallum observes that “[a]dolescent fiction, and many of the discussions which surround it, typically assume and valorize humanistic concepts of individual agency, that is the capacity to act independently of social restraint” (7). Yet a certain kind of “social restraint” actually bolsters Tommy’s individual agency. By accepting the restraints of his community and his responsibilities toward it, Tommy claims greater personal agency over choices regarding his everyday actions and political commitments. In his chapter on self-determination in *Power and Place*, Daniel Wildcat attests that it may sound like a contradiction to members of dominant Western societies, but “the more attentive one is to their community, the more self-determining they can be; the less attentive, the more selfish and self-destructing they will be” (149). This is certainly true for Tommy. As he reflects on learning about responsibility at the camp, Tommy writes, “I saw then that each one of us who faltered was irreplaceable and a loss to all. In that way, I learned how important and how precious my existence was. I was necessary” (Armstrong, *Slash* 203). It is precisely by accepting his place in the community that Tommy finds value as an individual. He writes of this time of returning home, settling on his family’s ancestral lands, and beginning to serve his people, “I had never felt so strong in all my life” (230). He feels strong as an individual because of his participation in his community. In the Okanagan language, people are referred to not with general pronouns but based on how they are related to others (Armstrong, “Jeannette Armstrong” 118–19). Individuals are understood to be part of a web, and they are empowered, not overshadowed, through their connections to others in the web.

That Tommy and his community are mutually empowered via his reintegration demonstrates the resistive and restorative nature of Okanagan interdependence. Traditionally, Okanagan children are raised by an extended family network, carefully attended to as individuals, and taught the laws of the people that center on the law “to learn to live and work in harmony with everyone and share with everyone in the community” (Armstrong et al. 14–15). In the first part of *Slash*, Tommy becomes divided from his Okanagan community through colonial schooling, his internalized sense of inferiority, his misdirected anger, and his buying into colonial attempts to weaken Indians with drugs and alcohol. His attempt to fight against colonialism as an individual estranged from

his Okanagan community is not only unhealthy for him personally but also inherently ineffective because, the novel shows, colonialism itself has caused his isolation. In *Native Hubs*, Renya Ramirez contends that “Indigenous peoples sharing their past and contemporary experiences is a process of bringing back together or *re-mem-ber-ing* (a term recuperated by Guillermo Delgado-P, an Indigenous scholar) the Native social body that has been torn apart by colonization” (9). In reintegrating with his Okanagan community, Tommy joins them in remembering the community’s interdependent way of life before colonization, the divisive trauma of colonization, and the resources they have within their own culture for healing from that trauma and moving forward. Through this reintegration and remembering, Tommy’s Okanagan community is able to re-member itself in a vibrant form that colonization was meant to destroy.

It is not new to the Okanagan (or many other Indigenous communities) to understand individuals as being empowered through connection to community, but this notion contrasts sharply with the repressive characterization of reintegration typical of YA literature. In *Slash*, Tommy’s reintegration into his Indigenous society not only empowers him personally but also bolsters his and his community’s rebellion against colonialism. Returning home after his extensive travels, he “recalled the things [the elders in his community] talked about when they talked about protecting our land and our ways,” and, he writes, “I finally understood how that tied into the problems of our people” (Armstrong, *Slash* 206). He remembers that during his childhood days his Uncle Joe had stressed the importance of maintaining cultural and spiritual traditions, and his elder Pra-cwa had declared that “we are a people” with “rights [that] come from the Creator” (191, 209–10). In reconciling with the traditionalists in his Okanagan community, Tommy comes to accept their vision for sovereignty—based in a stance of complete autonomy from the Canadian government and a commitment to strengthening the people by investing in their traditional practices and homelands—and to freshly articulate that vision for young people in the community. The novel suggests that Tommy and his community more effectively resist colonialism when they heed the elders’ wisdom by revitalizing Okanagan traditions and by speaking out against “assimilate or get lost” colonialist policies that threaten their inherent right to self-determination (70, 208–54).

Even the adolescent reform novel tradition—the strand of YA literature that most stridently challenges dominant social norms (despite more and less subtly simultaneously reinscribing those norms)—fails to account for the type of interdependent Indigenous empowerment found in *Slash*. As Trites explains in *Twain, Alcott, and the Birth of the Adolescent Reform Novel*, this tradition, which began with nineteenth-century works by the likes of Mark Twain and Louisa May Alcott, continues with many contemporary YA titles. In these texts, Trites observes,

the protagonist is an ethical character who transcends his or her society by some form of self-reliance. . . . If the protagonist experiences growth—and s/he usually does—that growth provides a commentary as to how the society itself might also “grow” (i.e., improve). And the character’s growth is a sign that the society can, indeed, potentially change. . . . These texts share a romantic faith in the ability of youth to improve the future. The message to readers is, invariably, “with self-improvement, you can improve the world.” (*Twain* 143–44)

Like other protagonists in the adolescent reform novel tradition, Tommy’s growth as a character illuminates ways that his Okanagan and pan-Indigenous society can change for the better. As he comes to embrace an internally focused holistic approach to Indigenous self-determination, Armstrong clearly suggests that Indian Country as a whole would do well to grow in that same direction. Tommy also believes that he and others can improve the world with self-improvement. Unlike other protagonists in the tradition, however, his version of self-improvement is the opposite of self-reliance. It is an acceptance of community interdependence and responsibility.

As he becomes a leader in his community, Tommy does not occupy this role as a transcendent social critic like the YA protagonist-rebels in other reform novels do, nor does he stand apart as ethically superior to his community. In fact, his estrangement from his Okanagan community gives him a distorted view, not a transcendent one, and it is only when he reintegrates and learns from others in his community that he is able to understand what his society needs and how he can contribute to those needs. Moreover, while he does ethically transcend the dominant colonial society that he critiques, he is only able to do so with help from his Okanagan and pan-Indigenous communities.⁶ The adolescent

reform novel convention of an enlightened individual protagonist's conscious need to grow serving as a metaphor for society's need to grow (and paving the way for that growth) thus fails to account for the way in which Tommy's growth and that of his community are so completely intertwined. Unlike in the majority of YA texts, in *Slash*, the individual's growth does not come before or guide the community's growth; instead, the growth of both individual and community happen simultaneously and nurture one another. YA literary theory must expand beyond its focus on negative institutional power and self-reliant individual power in order to account for these unique power dynamics at play in *Slash* and in many other Indigenous YA texts.

GIVING VOICE TO THE SILENCED:

SLASH'S USE OF NARRATIVE POWER

In deploying a strong first-person voice to represent her unique protagonist, Armstrong may draw criticism from scholars interested in reader/author power dynamics. In "The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel," after characterizing most YA authors' use of narrative authority as manipulative and repressive, Mike Cadden argues that a writer can make this dynamic less repressive and more "ethical" by crafting a "self-conscious," "self-questioning" narrator who engages with "equal and multiple viewpoints," or, better yet, by creating multiple diverse narrators. In Cadden's view, these postmodern strategies can displace the authority of the writer/narrator and empower young readers with greater interpretive agency. Cadden fails to acknowledge, however, that the first-person voice might actually empower readers when it represents those who have been silenced or marginalized (146). As Margery Fee argues when discussing the use of first-person narration in *Slash* and other Indigenous literature, "This may not be a subversive tactic in a classic realist text or in the popular novel, but it is within the literary discourse of Canada" (172). Through first-person narrators, Fee contends, these texts "give a voice directly to those who generally are silenced" (172). As the self-conscious author of his own story, *Slash's* Tommy confronts the colonial silencing of Indigenous voices and models for Indigenous young people the crafting of a strong personal voice that resists colonialism and contributes to Indigenous sovereignty, including sovereignty over representation.

Armstrong is fiercely committed to Indigenous self-determination in the realm of representation and has frequently spoken of its importance for Indigenous young people. In an interview with Janice Williamson, Armstrong explained, “The suicide rates and problems our people are having are a result of being told you’re stupid, ignorant, a drunk, you’ll never amount to anything—just because you’re Indian. To me, that’s the biggest lie of all that needs to be dispelled. It’s my vocation or commitment to do that and whatever happens for non-Native people in that process is a bi-product” (“Jeannette Armstrong” 116). In Armstrong’s view, dominant society’s derogatory representations of Indigenous people have incredibly destructive effects. She therefore emphasizes, in the Williamson interview and other venues, the importance of Indigenous young people receiving healing and empowerment through accurate Native-authored representations of Native identity (Armstrong, “Jeannette Armstrong” 119–20; interview with Lutz 18; “Body” 16).

In addition to offering a strong, self-determined Indigenous voice, *Slash*’s narrator/protagonist, Tommy, models the process of developing an empowered voice through struggle, dialogue, and writing. In the prologue, Tommy says that he is writing a fictional novel as a way to “examine” and attempt to “understand” how he has changed personally along with “what changes our people went through during those times and what we are coming up against” (Armstrong, *Slash* 13). We are to understand that the character Tommy, not just the author Armstrong, is crafting a novel and that he uses his writing process to think through ways that he and his community have changed and may continue to develop in the future. *Slash* thereby meets one of Cadden’s criteria for ethical narration: drawing attention to its own construction (146, 149, 153). Beyond the prologue, as he develops his ideas and identity over the course of the novel, Tommy also develops his voice, from his vocabulary and cadence to his confidence and coherence.⁷ His voice, like his identity, is always in process. In the first part of the book, Tommy often records instances when he is unsure about how to respond to different, sometimes competing voices he encounters (Armstrong, *Slash* 37, 42–43, 73–74, 131, 160). Reflecting on one such experience, he writes, “I couldn’t seem to get the right words together” (131). In depicting Tommy’s struggle—and sometimes failure—to find his voice, *Slash* assures young readers that they are not alone in their struggles to discover their voices. Tommy especially models for young Indigenous readers how to

keep struggling for their voices by rooting themselves in their cultural traditions and engaging in constant dialogue with others in and beyond their communities. *Slash* also teaches young non-Native readers how to develop their voices by questioning colonialist perspectives and by listening to Indigenous voices that have too often been silenced.

In Cadden's framework, YA literature is more likely to empower young readers to question authority and engage diverse perspectives if it employs both multiple voices and meta-attention to reading and interpretation. These techniques, Cadden posits, open possibilities for readers to question the authority of narrators and to see "horizontal power relationships" at play in the texts, which may, in turn, enable them to see vertical power dynamics at play between themselves and the texts' adult authors (146). Like other "more ethical" YA texts that Cadden discusses, *Slash* uses polyphony and metanarrative techniques in ways that enable readers to question authority within the text and within the author/reader relationship. *Slash* also goes further by teaching readers to question authority within larger societal narratives, especially colonialist ones.

A scene from early in the novel aptly illustrates how *Slash* empowers readers by representing multiple voices and drawing meta-attention to the process of navigating those voices. When Tommy and his siblings are about to begin attending school in town, where they will have white classmates for the first time, Tommy's father tells the children that the white students "will probably treat you mean and make fun of how you talk and how you dress and how you look." He urges, "Don't listen to them. Be proud that you're Indian. . . . We are the people who have every right to be here. We ain't sneaking in from somewhere and pushing our way in. Remember that every time one of them says anything bad to you" (Armstrong, *Slash* 23). His prediction soon proves true concerning white administrators and teachers, as well as students. The principal addresses the new Native students by saying, "You Indians are lucky to be here. We'll get along just fine as long as you don't steal from the other kids"; and a child on the playground says, "You frigging Injuns are nothing but thieves, full of lice, everybody knows that!" (23, 24). When warning his children about these disparaging perspectives, Tommy's father also teaches them to tell a different story, one that casts Indians as proud and worthy of respect. Readers encounter variations on these competing stories and responses to them throughout the novel. By pre-

senting competing narratives and interpretations—like that of Tommy’s father—*Slash* teaches readers to think critically about the narratives they encounter and to pose their own interpretations.

In addition to building what Margery Fee characterizes as a “counter discourse” to colonialist narratives (as illustrated above), *Slash* demonstrates room for critical reading within that developing counter discourse.⁸ As he brings a self-reflective, questioning attitude to his personal development, Tommy also frequently questions and changes his interpretations of others’ perspectives. He often records an event or conversation and then later comments on how his original reaction to the incident has shifted, like when he realizes his Okanagan elders had been trying to teach him the same things he searched for in his travels or when conversations with his cousin Chuck move him away from a focus on confronting colonial power and toward an internal community-building approach to sovereignty (Armstrong, *Slash* 206–10, 139–42, 236–45).

In drawing meta-attention to this process of self-reflective interpretation, the novel teaches readers “interpretive strategies,” a tactic that YA literature scholar Robyn McCallum suggests can empower readers to develop their own interpretive agency (8). Following Tommy’s model, readers learn to question their own initial interpretations and to raise questions about Tommy’s and other characters’ perspectives. Readers might connect scenes and question interpretations that Tommy does not question, making for a more dynamic and empowering literary experience. For example, even though Tommy gets the last word after his wife, Maeg, explains why she, unlike Tommy, wants to participate in the constitution talks, readers have the power to continue engaging Maeg’s position and questioning Tommy’s reading of it because of the interpretive agency Tommy has modeled for them (Armstrong, *Slash* 243–44).

Slash prods readers to bring their interpretive agency beyond the page as well. Just as Tommy illuminates the importance of dialogue in his own journey, he also suggests that those of his son’s generation, to whom he addresses the narrative, should not receive his story as a fixed authoritative guide. Tommy writes in the prologue that all Indian people “have the burden of individually deciding for our descendants how their world shall be affected and what shall be their heritage” (Armstrong, *Slash* 13). Throughout the rest of the novel, he demonstrates how Indig-

enous individuals do the best job of shaping the world for their descendants when they root themselves in and commit themselves to their local communities in a way that entails continuous questioning, reflection, and dialogue rather than blind allegiance. *Slash*, moreover, might inspire both non-Indigenous and Indigenous readers to bring the interpretive agency and questioning attitude they learn through their reading experience to their developing individual perspectives, their local communities, and their larger societies.

While Cadden's discussion of literary techniques that encourage readers to expose and question discursive power focuses on novels and narrative theory of the late twentieth century, these same techniques have a much longer history in Indigenous storytelling traditions. The writers of *We Get Our Living Like Milk from the Land* explain how, through stories, Okanagan people remember their history, how they have survived as a people, and what laws of living have strengthened them. This rich body of stories, the *cəpcaptikwł*, is passed on orally from one generation to the next, and with each telling the community freshly imagines how to live out the values found in their history (Armstrong et al. 15). For the Okanagan and numerous other Indigenous communities, oral tradition is inherently communal, interactive, and dynamic; listeners bring their own interpretations, ideas, and questions to the stories as they hear them and as they adapt them for future audiences. Stories from Indigenous oral and written traditions, moreover, frequently draw attention to the simultaneously powerful and slippery nature of discourse. For centuries Indigenous writers, from Samson Occom and Zitkala-Ša to Leslie Marmon Silko and Lee Maracle, have drawn on these traditions in order to expose discursive power, resist narrative authority claimed by colonizers, and prod listeners/readers—especially Native audiences—to claim their own voices as they unmask and challenge oppressive narratives. In resisting oppressive discourses and encouraging audiences to keep critically engaging all of the discourses that they encounter once they have put the book down, *Slash*, then, not only mirrors techniques of contemporary ethical YA fiction but also carries on long-standing Indigenous narrative traditions.⁹

While *Slash* represents multiple voices and equips readers to critically engage those voices, it does not depict all of the perspectives it represents as equally valid, thereby parting ways with Cadden's charge that ethical narration deal with "equal and multiple viewpoints" (148, my

emphasis). As previously discussed, the text teaches readers to challenge colonialist narratives by valuing Indigenous perspectives. Moreover, even though it equips readers to critically engage Indigenous voices—including Tommy's—the novel also clearly privileges those perspectives that align with Tommy's uncompromising and internally-focused approach to sovereignty. *Slash* thereby carries on the didactic as well as the dynamic quality of Okanagan oral tradition. There is room for multiplicity, questioning, and change in that tradition, but the tradition is also meant to impart particular values. One story about a turtle, for example, teaches listeners "that we must not think of ourselves as individuals" but as interdependent members of the community, a value that *Slash* reflects via its revision of YA conventions regarding individual/community power dynamics (Armstrong et al. 15). *Slash* thus extends traditional Okanagan narratives through its own privileging of certain perspectives, as well as through its imaginative adaptability.

Does *Slash*'s privileging of Indigenous voices over colonialist ones and certain Indigenous perspectives over others make it unethical? Does privileging certain positions over others always inevitably result in oppression? Is relativism a necessary component of ethical writing, reading, and living? Cadden is among a host of scholars in literary and cultural studies who suggest that multiplicity, hybridity, and relativism are indeed crucial components of both ethical societies and ethical works of art. Some scholars in Indigenous studies—including those who identify with American Indian literary nationalism—have critiqued this position, arguing that hybridity itself often operates as an oppressive discourse that denies the validity of particular Indigenous identities (and we could add narrative traditions) while undermining claims to Indigenous self-determination.¹⁰

In my view, literature like *Slash* that equips readers to privilege Indigenous perspectives while critiquing colonialist ones is acutely ethical, especially given that colonialist perspectives are privileged almost everywhere else, including in most books for children and young adults. In the larger landscape of Indigenous YA literature, *Slash* is far from alone in suggesting that some approaches to sovereignty are more effective than others and that some degree of unity in diversity is necessary for strengthening Indigenous communities while resisting colonialism. Many recent Indigenous YA titles continue in *Slash*'s vein by uncovering colonialist ideologies underlying dominant discourses and by privileg-

ing Indigenous perspectives in ways that empower both readers of the texts and the characters within them.

OUT OF AND AFTER RED POWER:

SLASH'S VISION FOR INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY

The approach to Indigenous political sovereignty emphasizing autonomy and internal community building that Tommy comes to embrace in *Slash* was becoming the trend in many actual Indigenous communities in the United States and Canada at the time of Armstrong's writing, and it has become the prevailing approach in the decades since.¹¹ Vine Deloria Jr., one of Indian Country's most influential scholar/activists in the second half of the twentieth century, supported the American Indian Movement (AIM) but was also critical of its emphasis on confronting colonial institutions. In *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, Robert Warrior analyzes the perspective on sovereignty that unfolds over Deloria's work. Warrior notes that in Deloria's 1969 *Custer Died for Your Sins*, "the time was coming, [Deloria] predicted, when the politics of confrontation would have to end and the work of building communities would have to begin" (89). Deloria's influence across Indian Country surely helped to make his own prediction a reality in many Indigenous communities. "Because groups accomplish little by demanding that the dominating society change," Warrior observes, "Deloria advocates building communities and social structures through which those communities exercise political, economic, and spiritual power along with responsibility" (92). Like Tommy in the final part of *Slash*, Deloria called on Indigenous people to stop asking for power, rights, and recognition from colonial governments—as if these things could be "given"—and to instead focus on revitalizing their communities by tapping into the power found in their own traditions (Warrior 91–92; Deloria, *We Talk You Listen* 123).

Even though Deloria was critical of members of AIM for their emphasis on confrontation, he still supported them and saw their work as important (Warrior 89–90). Many in AIM and other Red Power groups encouraged Native people to revitalize traditions while also confronting colonial powers. Moreover, many contemporary Indigenous leaders credit Red Power with restoring Indian peoples' pride in being Indian and characterize this as the movement's most important contribution.¹²

In *Slash*, as Tommy grows critical of the anger-driven confrontational approach of his own Red Power days, he also recognizes the movement's important restorative role. Near the end of the novel, he tells his son, Marlon, "You are an Indian of a special generation. Your world will be hard but you will grow up proud to be Indian. That will make you different than some of us. If I keep to the Indian path and protect your rights the way Pra-cwa explained [by practicing them], you will be the generation to help the white men change because you won't be filled with hate" (Armstrong, *Slash* 250). Tommy hopes that his son's generation, having inherited the restorative gains of Red Power, will progress in their pride and strength to the point that they will actually reverse the colonial trajectory of assimilation.

In Tommy's understanding, when Indigenous people experience a restoration of their pride and renew their commitment to their communities, they naturally shift their primary focus away from confronting colonial institutions; their investment in Indigenous community itself becomes their primary means of resistance. He still recognizes that Native communities need to confront policies of the dominant state that interfere with their ability to self-govern and that their holistic empowerment further necessitates confronting dehumanizing colonial policies, discourses, and practices, especially those they have internalized. However, his overall attitude toward confrontation turns inside out by the end of the novel. Instead of focusing on masses of Indigenous people confronting colonial powers with justifiable anger, he nudges himself and other Native people to honestly and respectfully confront one another, pushing one another toward the reintegration, responsibility, and dynamic interactions that will make them strong.

Concepts like dynamism, adaptation, fluidity, and hybridity are championed by advocates of cosmopolitanism who often alternately accuse nationalists of being essentialist and isolationist. Scholars like Craig Womack, Jace Weaver, Robert Warrior, and Lisa Brooks in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* and Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair in "Tending to Ourselves: Hybridity and Native Literary Criticism" have responded to these accusations by articulating approaches to Indigenous nationalism that embrace cultural dynamism while promoting *critical* engagement not only with literature and criticism but also with tribal governments. These scholars demonstrate that we can recognize cultures as dynamic units that borrow from one another, acknowledge the

multiple cultural affiliations of individuals, and discuss cross-cultural exchange without falling into the trap of seeing cultures either as overly static/reified or as so overly unstable/indefinable as to be meaningless. They suggest that the best expressions of Native sovereignty encourage dynamic development and self-critique within Native communities while simultaneously acknowledging the distinctive political status of those communities and their right to determine their own futures.

In offering a self-consciously young adult literary representation of an internally focused, resolute, and dynamic approach to Indigenous sovereignty coming out of and after Red Power, *Slash* not only anticipates the nationalist turn in Native literary criticism but also uniquely illuminates the various commitments at play in this approach to sovereignty and the relationship among those commitments. First, through its reworking of YA conventions, *Slash* underscores the complexly collaborative nature of Indigenous empowerment. Tommy must connect with and learn from members of his community in order to effectively understand, advocate for, and practice the holistic, internally focused approach to sovereignty championed by the novel. As previously discussed, the novel contrasts with other YA texts, as it depicts an individual protagonist who is personally empowered through his reintegration with his community and who contributes to that community's empowerment in the face of colonialism. While scholarship in the literary nationalism school has largely moved away from the focus on personal identity that had previously dominated the field, *Slash*, like most YA texts, is centrally concerned with the personal growth of a young individual. As *Slash* renders that individual's growth as more communal than most other YA texts would, it also reveals that concerns related to communal sovereignty are often actually intertwined with issues of personal identity. By studying *Slash* and other Indigenous YA texts, scholars in Native literary studies are thus necessarily prodded to return to questions of personal identity but in ways that are intricately connected to rather than severed from political concerns.

From my own study of *Slash* and other Indigenous YA texts, I theorize an approach to Indigenous self-determination that I term *collaborative sovereignty*. This term marks a distinction from understandings of individual agency in YA literary studies while also underscoring how these texts adapt the YA genre in order to represent Native sovereignty as a continuous, dynamic, collaborative process involving both individuals

and communities. I define collaborative sovereignty in terms of a commitment to a set of primary and secondary tenets. The primary tenets are (1) Indigenous self-determination (including over governance, education, culture, and representation) and resistance to colonialist threats to self-determination; (2) internal strengthening of Indigenous communities through their investment in specific tribal/intertribal cultural practices, relationships, and responsibilities; and (3) mutual empowerment of Indigenous individuals and their communities. The secondary tenets include (1) dialogue with multiple diverse voices; (2) dynamic development; (3) self-reflection/self-critique; and (4) alliances across tribal, national, and racial lines.

The ideas behind these tenets are not new for Native studies, but *Slash* sheds new light on them.¹³ In addition to inviting us to consider old issues of identity in new ways, as discussed above and reflected in the third primary tenet of collaborative sovereignty, *Slash* contributes to Native literary studies through its representation of a hierarchy of commitments within its approach to sovereignty. This hierarchy, which I characterize as a primary/secondary divide within the tenets of collaborative sovereignty, clarifies and contributes to the long-running debate in our field about whether and how nationalism and cosmopolitanism can be reconciled. I identify the secondary tenets of collaborative sovereignty as secondary because while *Slash* values them, it also reveals how they are at best unproductive and at worst destructive when they are not exercised in the service of the primary tenets.

During his time of physical and spiritual separation from his Okanagan community in the first part of the novel, Tommy moves all around North America (dynamism), conversing with a diverse array of other Indians (dialogue/alliances), and thinking often about his own plight and his feelings toward Red Power (self-reflection). Yet Tommy is portrayed in this period as self-destructive and as failing to make positive contributions to his Okanagan and intertribal communities. His dynamism, dialogue, self-reflection, and alliances only become productive when he reintegrates with his Okanagan community, is strengthened by that community, and commits himself to the strengthening of that community.

In seeing Tommy as still engaging multiple voices and still experiencing dynamic growth at the end of the novel, my reading diverges from that of many other scholars who see *Slash* as ultimately silencing the

multiple voices it represents, since, in the end, the text so clearly privileges a single position on the constitution talks (Van Styvendale 209; Green 63–64; Fee 174). While these critics emphasize the singular nature of Tommy's approach to sovereignty—sometimes granting that we still hear multiple voices at the end of Armstrong's novel *despite* this singular approach—I contend that Tommy remains a fluid character at the end of his narrative *because* the approach to sovereignty he comes to embrace demands constant dialogue, movement, and growth. *Slash* does unmistakably privilege Tommy's position, and Armstrong might have served readers better with a more open ending, one that did not entail killing off Tommy's wife, Maeg, who represents an arguably still prosovereignty nuanced alternative to Tommy's position. However, Tommy comes to his position on the constitution talks through a great deal of dialogue, dynamic movement, self-reflection, and self-critique, practices that the novel suggests are integral to the meaning of sovereignty.

We see evidence of Tommy's ongoing development and the importance of dynamism in his approach to sovereignty in the final chapter of the novel as Tommy says to his friend Jimmy, "We are slowly learning decolonization. We got to recognize our solutions to some of those social problems are in progress already. We have our own interpretations as to how we function best" (Armstrong, *Slash* 223–24). In describing decolonization and self-determination as ways of being that Okanagan and other Indigenous people are "slowly learning," Tommy, like Vine Deloria Jr. and Scott Lyons, casts sovereignty as a *process* of empowerment and renewal, not just an end (Warrior 91; Lyons 449). To borrow Warrior's words, Tommy, like Deloria, "recognizes that American Indians [and their counterparts in Canada] have to go through a process of building community and that that process will define the future" (91). Tommy's process-based understanding of sovereignty comes across through both his actions and his words in the final third of the novel. Through its portrayal of Tommy's involvement in political meetings, after-school programs, family gatherings, and cultural events in his local community, as well as through intertribal protests, meetings, and other gatherings, *Slash* demonstrates that learning decolonization, discerning Indigenous-based solutions to problems, and interpreting how to function best as Indigenous communities are dynamic—and sometimes very difficult—processes. In the epilogue, as Tommy dedicates his story to his son and those of his son's generation, the novel further suggests that

these future-defining, people-defining processes of sovereignty should continue well beyond Tommy's own generation (Armstrong, *Slash* 253).

BEYOND SLASH

Slash's engagement with the YA genre contributes to its portrayal of collaborative sovereignty. The hierarchy between the primary and secondary tenets of collaborative sovereignty comes to the fore through the novel's previously discussed revision of YA conventions surrounding the power dynamics of individual/community reconciliation. The novel renders the secondary tenets as valuable at the precise point of Tommy's reintegration with his Okanagan community, a reintegration that coincides with and enables his turn toward a robust investment in the primary tenets. The potential-rich, dynamic, rebellious space of adolescence further advances the book's collaborative sovereignty vision.¹⁴

In my larger project, my theorizing of collaborative sovereignty begins with *Slash* and continues through readings of more recent Indigenous young adult works, including Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Joseph Bruchac's *The Heart of a Chief*, Eric Gansworth's *If I Ever Get Out of Here*, Cynthia Leitich Smith's *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, Susan Power's "Drum Kiss," Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer*, and Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel's *Oracles*. In that project I further examine the collaborative sovereignty framework that emerges from these texts and further analyze ways the texts reinvent the YA genre and subgenres such as romance narratives and school stories. Unlike *Slash*, the other texts in my study all include a significant focus on relationships between Native and non-Native characters. They underscore the tenets of collaborative sovereignty, I argue, and the primary/secondary divide through their portrayals of those relationships. When the Indigenous characters in these texts neglect their specific Native communities as they engage non-Native outsiders, they experience negative consequences (sometimes dire consequences, like dying or getting turned into a vampire, as in Zobel's and Taylor's speculative texts). When, by contrast, they remain responsible to their specific Indigenous communities as they pursue intercultural exchange and adapt their own cultures, these same characters experience personal benefit and empower their communities.

I hope that other scholars will critically engage the collaborative sovereignty framework that I identify as emerging from *Slash* and other Indigenous YA texts. I also look forward to the additional interpretive frameworks that scholars will develop through their readings of these texts. The rich and growing body of American Indian and Canadian Aboriginal young adult literature has much to offer in and beyond Native literary studies. As Alexie noted in his National Book Award acceptance speech, YA texts have more power than works of adult literary fiction do to reach large, diverse, impressionable audiences. I would add that Indigenous YA texts represent Native experiences with as much and sometimes more complexity than their adult counterparts do. Madeleine L'Engle says, "You have to write the book that wants to be written. And if the book will be too difficult for grown-ups, then you write it for children." As more and more Indigenous authors come to this realization, I see another major YA award winner on the horizon. You do not, however, have to wait until then to pay attention.

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NOTES

1. See Doris Seale and Beverly Slapin's books *A Broken Flute* and *Through Indian Eyes*, Paulette Molin's book *American Indian Themes in Young Adult Literature*, Clare Bradford's book *Unsettling Narratives*, and Debbie Reese's blog *American Indians in Children's Literature*.

2. Tommy participates in the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan, which ended with the occupation of the Washington, DC, Bureau of Indian Affairs building, and the 1974 Native Peoples' Caravan across Canada, along with a host of lesser-known protests, occupations, and meetings.

3. Armstrong discusses *Slash*'s origins as an initiative of the Okanagan Indian Curriculum Project and her desire to reach teen readers in several interviews, including those with Victoria Freeman, Hartmut Lutz, and Janice Williamson.

4. These scholars' efforts have made significant impacts in individual classrooms, libraries, and communities, as well as in larger movements such as the #We Need

Diverse Books campaign of recent years. Nevertheless, they would also be the first to acknowledge that non-Native texts and stereotyped representations continue to dominate.

5. The Okanagan view of land as Mother inspires the title of *We Get Our Living Like Milk from the Land*, an Okanagan history book coedited by Armstrong. In *That the People Might Live*, Jace Weaver addresses the trend across Native communities of seeing land as part of community, leading him to identify literature as “communitist” only if it has “a proactive commitment to Native community, including what I term the ‘wider community’ of Creation itself” (xiii).

6. He does not address the implications for YA literary theory, but my reading here otherwise aligns with Matthew Green’s argument that “it is possible to conceive of Slash [Tommy] as a role model and teacher without suggesting that he has risen *above* the rest of the Native community. On the contrary, as we have seen, it is precisely because Slash has come to recognize his position *within* the community that he can speak confidently and insightfully” (65, emphasis in original).

7. Armstrong describes her careful attention to the development of Tommy’s voice in her interview with Karin Beeler (146).

8. Julia Emberley joins Fee in focusing on ways that the multiple voices in *Slash* form a counter discourse to dominant colonial narratives. My work extends theirs, as I argue that the novel also highlights the need for dialogue within the counter discourses, as well as the need for discourses that are not focused on countering colonial voices at all but rather on adapting Indigenous traditions in order to strengthen Indigenous communities from within.

9. As several critics discuss, we also see stylistic evidence of oral tradition influences in *Slash* (Morton 20–23; Jones 55–59; Emberley 131). Armstrong discusses *Slash*’s engagement with oral tradition in her interviews with Kim Anderson and Karin Beeler.

10. Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair’s “Tending to Ourselves: Hybridity and Native Literary Criticism” includes a thorough overview of critiques of hybridity from Indigenous studies while also calling for an Indigenous “re-working” of the concept.

11. While he personally takes issue with “sovereignty” as an imposed European paradigm, in his *Companion to American Indian History* entry on sovereignty Taiaiake Alfred also credits Native sovereignty movements of recent decades with working to “restore [Indigenous peoples’] autonomous power and cultural integrity in the area of governance” and to “rejec[t] the models of government rooted in European cultural values” (465). He acknowledges, moreover, that “in the past two or three generations, there has been movement for the good in terms of rebuilding social cohesion, gaining economic self-sufficiency, and empowering structures of self-government within indigenous communities. There has also been a return to seeking guidance in traditional teachings, and a revitalization of the traditions that sustained the great cultural achievement of respectful coexistence. People have begun to appreciate that wisdom, and much of the discourse on what constitutes justice and proper relationship within indigenous communities today revolves around the struggle to promote the recovery of these values” (Alfred 472–73).

12. In an interview with Hartmut Lutz, Armstrong explains that a major motivation in writing *Slash* was to pass on the feeling of “renewal”—renewed commitment to Indigenous traditions, as well as renewed pride in being Indian—that came out of Red Power (14–15).

13. Vine Deloria Jr. and Scott Lyons, among others, have described sovereignty as a dynamic process while emphasizing Indigenous autonomy and internal community building. Kristina Fagan, Daniel Heath Justice, Mark Rifkin, and others writing within literary nationalist and/or queer Indigenous studies frameworks have stressed the importance of diverse voices, self-reflection, and self-critique within Indigenous sovereignty movements. Scholars like Malea Powell, Andrea Smith, and Renya Ramirez have theorized roles that alliances can play in support of Indigenous sovereignty. See the works cited for specific titles.

14. In my larger project, I read *Slash* as reversing the long-running derogatory association of Indians with adolescence: the popular notion, discussed by scholars like Philip Deloria and Kent Baxter, that Indians are like unruly, unstable, underdeveloped adolescents who need to “grow up” by assimilating into white society (Deloria 95–127; Baxter 44–115). Tommy embraces the association of adolescence with vibrancy, rebellion, and fluidity, suggesting that he and other Native people should remain in that adolescent space even into adulthood so as to resist assimilation while dynamically living out their sovereignty. While *Slash* stands out for featuring an adult character embracing a kind of perpetual adolescent space, the other YA texts in my study similarly characterize adolescence as a positive space that can empower Native communities.

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The New People

Reading for Peoplehood in Métis Literatures

JENNIFER ADESE

While I was heavily involved in the Niagara Native community throughout my teenage years I had little sense of myself as Métis. I was born in North Vancouver, British Columbia, and spent the first few years of my life in a small town called Squamish, north of North Vancouver. My parents met at a party in the apartment building they both lived in in North Vancouver, and after marrying, they relocated to Squamish with their blended family. Neither of them was originally from the area. My dad moved to BC in the early 1970s from his hometown of Edmonton, Alberta, after a stint in the Royal Canadian Navy and took up working for the railway. My mother also moved to BC in the early 1970s from her hometown of St. Catharines, Ontario, where she had been born and adopted into an English Mennonite family. She traveled to BC at the invitation of her then-boyfriend, an architect, bringing with her her two children from her first marriage. My parents were not married long, and I was just over two years old when my father died. Shrouded in a veil of grief and despair, my mother did the only thing she could clearly think to do: she returned to her hometown with her children in tow and drew on the support of her family.

Having been raised in St. Catharines meant that in many ways it was my home. Yet I was always keenly aware that I was not “from” there. My mother, as an adopted person, in spite of strong ties with her adoptive family, lacked a strong sense of connection to her hometown. In the absence of knowledge about her own birth family and history, she felt that it was important to provide me with as much connection to where I was born, and to my father’s family in Alberta, as she feasibly could so that I could grow up “knowing” who I was. My childhood sense of identity was therefore built by decoupage through the accumulation of

fragments of information from my mom. It was supplemented by fleeting contact with my grandma during her calls, letters, and visits from Edmonton to St. Catharines and numerous faded photographs of a life I had briefly been a part of yet could not remember. What stood out to me then, as it does now, is that words like “Cree” and “French” entered my vocabulary fairly early on as my mother sought to tell me “what” I was and as my grandma, when prodded, offered words like “breed” and “Scotch.”

As I reached my early teenage years, I was drawn into programming at my high school for urban Native kids. Through my school’s Native Circle initiative and my growing connection with the wider urban Native community, my identity as a Native person crystallized, and other Native people around me encouraged me to identify myself as “Native” rather than continually referring to myself as “part Cree.” I had been so used to referring to myself in parts that it was a relief to begin to see myself as whole and, truly, as complete, and I took this rearticulated sense of myself very seriously. I remember the first time a well-meaning non-Native friend suggested that I read a book by a woman often referred to as a “Métis author,” a writer named Maria Campbell. When I looked at the book jacket and saw the title *Halfbreed*, I scoffed, “Why would I want to read that? I’m not Métis or half-anything, I’m Native!”

In the wake of the formation of my identity as Native, I rebuked outsiders’ attempts to link myself to Campbell and her work for two reasons. First, I saw myself as a “whole” Native person, and that way of seeing myself was nurtured by the other members of the Native community around me. I struggled to assert this “whole” identity—meaning a way of understanding and expressing myself in mind, body, and spirit as a person who is marked by my completeness, not by a sense of myself as fragmented—in the face of various (primarily) European Canadian people who insisted that I accept and identify myself in accordance with what they perceived as my patchwork, “mixed-race” existence. I came to view narratives of “mixedness,” underpinned by an ethos of fragmentation, as contrasting a sense of myself as a whole and complete person. In many instances, those who insisted that I embrace my purported mixedness (which in reality generally meant that they wanted to see me own my European Canadianness) felt that I could not be *just* Native. Whatever their perception of Nativeness, it seemed to hinge on the interpretation

of it as a singular identity, associated with a purported *purity* of Indigeneity that did not allow for those they read as “mixed” to be considered “wholly Native.” My identification as Native did not, therefore, suitably account for my “mixedness.”

I, on the other hand, had come to see the world in a different way. I saw no issue with asserting myself as a Native person. The understanding of myself as Native did not negate the realities that as a light-skinned person I was, on all but a few occasions, impervious to the racism visited on my darker-skinned Native friends. My identity as a Native person was not, however, born from a preoccupation with blood quantum but was instead born from a communally connected sense of identity that thrived all around me. It was born in the afternoons preparing food in the kitchen of the Native Centre alongside other Native-identifying women while dancing and singing alongside other Native people at community socials and powwows, while playing pool in the games room of the Native Centre, and it was born through trips with other Native kids to events like Youth and Elder Gatherings held both in the city and on-reserve. I therefore did not struggle to see myself as Native because my identity as a Native person was not formed in isolation.

I also consciously and subconsciously distanced myself from Campbell’s writing because in the region that I grew up in there was no contemporary Métis community that bore a historic connection to a long-standing, self-identified Métis community. When, on rare occasions, a person identified as Métis in events within communal spaces such as the local Native Centre, they generally voiced this as meaning that they were someone of (any variation and purported degree of) “mixed” Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry. At its core, and as I will discuss further in this article, this way of asserting Métisness as an Indigenous identity is deeply raced and therefore quite problematic. Indeed, such expressions of Métisness as underpinned by racialized (il)logics garnered cynical responses from some of my friends who openly mocked claims of Métisness, positioning Métisness as a way in which “white people” with “distant Indian ancestry” would play out fantasies of Nativeness, insert themselves into Native spaces, and gain access to services and social programming dedicated to Native people.

In the mid-1990s the political advocacy body known as the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) became more vocal within the province and in my community. Early MNO articulations of Métisness, however, did

not provide me with an alternative pathway for comprehending Métisness that rendered Métisness any more appealing and/or relevant to me. Instead, the discourse of Métisness espoused by MNO representatives within my community appeared to perform in ways that affirmed my friends' critiques. In my earliest encounter with the MNO I recall being encouraged to apply to be a member by providing pictures of my "Native-looking" family members without any context for *how* they might be Métis. It immediately struck me that had I submitted pictures of Italian people who might be coded as "part Native," I would likely have received MNO membership. While the application form asked for names of my family members, there was no mechanism in place for how it might be demonstrated that those family members, and thus myself, were Métis people.

While MNO registration processes have become significantly more rigorous over the years, at the time of arriving to my community, local representatives encouraged a very open and ethically questionable membership policy. In spite of the fact that MNO is a political advocacy body and not a Métis proxy for Canada's Indian Act registry (maintained for those determined to be "status Indian"), membership with MNO would have provided me with a card that offered some symbolic legitimacy. I innately felt that something about that kind of Métis identity making was not quite right, because it jarred with my sensibilities regarding my understanding of both *why* I was a Native person and *how* I had come to identify as Native; Métisness seemed to begin and end with a self-interested form of self-identification. As such, I rejected the offer by a local member to apply and continued to disregard, and at times openly mock, the notion of Métisness.

As I grew into an adult, I began making calls to my family members in Alberta and BC. In doing so I began the often-painful process of knotting together ties that had been cut in the aftermath of my father's death, connecting with family members I had not seen since moving to Ontario as a toddler (such as my sister), and speaking with ones that I had not yet met (aunties, uncles, and cousins). When I asked about our Nateness, some family members explained their understanding of our relations through Métisness, Creeness, Frenchness, and Scottishness. Those who shared stories did so based on a body of shared experiences that I had not had access to growing up. I elected to build from these stories and found that the dawning of mass access to the Internet

allowed me to find even more family members to meet and share stories with. I also began to explore early digitized genealogical archives and online message boards, using them to affirm stories, fill in gaps in familial knowledge, and learn more about the movements of various family members and ancestors as tracked by things such as census records, vital statistics records, and shared online stories from people connected to different branches of my family tree. When I was able to save up enough money from working at my minimum-wage full-time job, I booked a ticket and boarded a plane to remeet my sister and other family members, armed with a black file folder of genealogical research, to continue stitching the pieces of my life back together.

In the years since, I have returned nearly annually to visit immediate and extended family in Athabasca, Mewassin, St. Albert, and Edmonton. I have traveled to Métis cultural events, dug around in archives, visited museums, paid my respects at numerous gravesites, and, wherever possible, walked the lands of my ancestors. I have traveled to both Saskatchewan and Manitoba on the trail of my ancestors, making sense of how my family fits within the wider scope of Métisness on the prairies. The confluence of these experiences, in particular, conversations with certain family members, helped me to see that Métisness is not, as Chris Andersen writes, a “soup kitchen for those disenfranchised” (“I’m Métis” 165). Métisness, contrary to my early impressions, is so very much more than misguided racial rhetoric or, as Andersen points out, more than a convenient pathway for making state-based claims to Indianness for those denied access via other paths of state recognition.

Destigmatizing Métisness and coming to see myself as a Métis person has followed a comparable pattern as did the Native identity formation of my youth. I could not come to see myself as Métis without the refractive lens of my family and stories that connect me to people and place. One major difference remains between these paths to identity formation, however, in that unlike my adoption of an urban-based Native identity that involved no immediate familial links or shared histories, my identity as Métis was not solely born from living in a community of similarly self-identifying people and the collective processes we engage in together. Métisness, and my invocation of it, is, to put it bluntly, a placeholder for a broad, meaningful, and very deep set of kinship ties, shared family and social (hi)stories, and shared geographic relations.

It is my hope that this narrative has provided some insight into some very localized and specific processes of identity formation. More importantly, I hope that it makes clear that, especially in the context of Métis identity, there is more that must be considered beyond individual self-ascription. Métisness cannot and should not be easily adopted by or ascribed to people without fuller understanding of a particular person's place within, relation to, or even dislocation from Métis community contexts. The difficulties with which people understand Métisness are not confined to the realm of everyday life, as academics from many disciplines have insisted on the narrative of "Métis as mixed," with little deference to definitions arising from within Métis collectivities. I would argue that literary studies has been perhaps more complicit in reifying the "Métis as mixed" narrative than other disciplines, given the methods deployed in the study of literature. Few literary scholars engage with Métis peoples and communities, instead privileging voices presented within and by the texts chosen for analysis themselves. Given the at times detached nature of textual analysis, I believe it is of central importance that we begin to seriously reconsider how we read those literatures we label as "Métis." Scholars who engage with Métis literatures as a baseline for engaging in ethical and respectful research must become better acquainted with the available body of literature produced in the field of Métis studies as to what it means to be Métis and, more specifically, with respect to notions of Métis *peoplehood*.

In an effort to demonstrate the value of such an approach, this article proceeds by charting the valuable contribution of new shifts in the field of Métis studies to readings of Métis life stories, or to what Deanna Reder reminds us are referred to in Cree and Michif languages as *acimisowin* (autobiographical stories or stories about life) (10). Texts like Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Gregory Scofield's *Thunder through My Veins* have put very public faces on Métisness and Halfbreedness in literature.¹ Yet many readers of such literatures lack the conceptual tools to access them from a position that has a more complex understanding of how and why Métis become and are Métis. As such, I discuss key aspects of Métis *peoplehood* with a specific focus on the concept of *wahkohtowin*. Following the discussion on what Métis studies contributes to reading Métis literatures, using Métis life stories as a base point for the conversation, I revisit the literary criticism surrounding some of Campbell's and Scofield's work to demonstrate some of the shortcomings of failing to

take tenets of Métis peoplehood into account. Lastly, in order to demonstrate the importance of centering Métis peoplehood in our analyses of Métis literary production, I return to discuss one of the core elements of Métis peoplehood—*wakhohtowin*, or, somewhat loosely, “kinship” and “relatedness”—in Herb Belcourt’s life narrative *Walking in the Woods: A Métis Journey*.

Through a reading of Belcourt’s text I argue that the notable emphasis on kinship and relatedness in Belcourt’s life story is the most important base point for conceptualizing Métis peoplehood within literary studies. Belcourt’s emphasis on kinship allows us to critically think about *how* Métis are Métis in ways that challenge us to go beyond the limited, and limiting, discourses of mixedness and *métissage*. Métis literary criticism that does not engage with Métis worldviews, histories, and ways of knowing elides Métis peoplehood, foments “Métis-as-mixed” rhetoric and reentrenches the racialization of Métis people. I ultimately argue that scholars approaching literary texts written by Métis authors need to ask questions about *how* the authors are Métis and work to adopt an antiracist practice in their readings of Métisness and Métis literatures. In doing so, better-informed literary criticism would be positioned to recognize how Métis writing is an extension of, and exists in relation to, Métis peoplehood. Métis people would see greater recognition of our writing as an extension of our peoplehood—as literary expressions of our existence as a distinct Indigenous people. Further, literary criticism would also then be better able to offer a fuller reflection on the complexities of Métis people’s writing and lives and to recognize that in spite of the persistence of racism and colonization, as Marilyn Dumont writes, “we’re still here and callin ourselves halfbreed” (52).

WRITING MÉTIS INTO BEING: MÉTIS STUDIES AND THE AFFIRMATION OF MÉTIS PEOPLEHOOD

Until quite recently, the majority of academic literature written about Métis peoples has been written by non-Métis. Instead of engaging with Métis worldviews, the wider body of academic literature as it pertains to Métis has been preoccupied with writing about Métis people through the lens of racial discourse, specifically through Métis people’s proximity to whiteness and Indianness. Métis people have been reduced to no more than by-products of simple processes of “race mixing” that was an

inevitable result of a so-called clash of Indigenous and European peoples. Indeed, this is perhaps most evident in Canadian public intellectual John Ralston Saul's 2008 book *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada*, which broadly argues that Canada is a "Métis nation." Saul's text seeks to indigenize non-Indigenous settlers by situating Métis as evidence of the successful cultural, social, and political mixedness of Canada. Saul relies on race-based narratives about Métis, arguing that "anyone whose family arrived before the 1760s is probably part Aboriginal" (qtd. in Macdougall, "Myth" 422). With this simple phrase, Saul diminishes Métis as an act of miscegenation. He is guided by embedded race thinking, a system of thought that for many Métis "negate[s] the stories of our families, the histories of our communities, the authenticity of our aboriginality" while simultaneously "reducing us to an in-between, incomplete, 'not-quite-people' who are stuck somewhere on the outside of the discourse" (Macdougall, "Myth" 422–23). The writing of people like Saul is underpinned by persistent racialized illogic that demonstrates little interest in Métis ways of knowing and conceptualizations of self.

Arguments such as Saul's claim Métisness for *all* Canadians. They also "obscur[e] the historical processes that gave rise to their [the Métis] cultural, political, and economic traditions" (Macdougall, "Myth" 423). In doing so, as Macdougall argues, they render Métisness as (incorrectly) ambivalent. This myth has widespread political implications. The myth of Métis ambivalence has led to a climate wherein anyone who does not find space for themselves within the other limited categories offered by the state can gain recognition by the state through claiming to be Métis via the "Métis-as-mixed" paradigm (see, for instance, recent critiques of author Joseph Boyden's occasional identification as Métis on the basis of claims of "mixed-bloodedness"). This creates confusion that more often than not sees Métisness divorced from its roots as a collective identity. It is instead refashioned as an identity that people can elect to adopt for the pursuit of individual self-interest. It obscures that although *métis* as a word exists as a fact of French language, it was through a complex interplay of cultural, social, economic, and political transformations that it became the identifier of choice of a distinctive Indigenous people. Racialized articulations of Métis identity threaten to empty Métisness of its meaning, obscure the fraught history of relations between Métis and their colonizers, and, as expressed by Andersen above, become used

as a catchall to represent any and all people who wish to lay claim to an Indigenous identity on the basis of possessing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry.

The confusion around Métisness is a product of what Jo-Ann Episkenew identifies as the “racist oppression that is a legacy of colonialism” (57). The challenge posed for Métis people is to make clear that we are distinct from self-identifying mixed peoples and indeed from the logic of mixedness altogether.² Scholars have begun to emphasize this within the field of Métis studies, where it is tied to recognizing that Métisness cannot be adequately understood outside of Métis peoplehood. Métis peoplehood is an important lens for analysis because it is less concerned with individualistic claims to Métis identity and more preoccupied with engaging in in-depth conversations about how Métisness was formed from, and should be understood in terms of, collective consciousness. Métis studies therefore provides important insight for scholars of Métis literature who, as I will discuss shortly, tend to privilege racialized and individualized frames of analysis.

One of the most significant texts to emerge in recent years from within the field of Métis studies is a 2012 edited volume compiled by Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall titled *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History*. The compilation was published on the heels of a 2009 interdisciplinary conference of Métis studies scholars. In their introduction, St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall write that through the course of the gathering, scholars clarified central shared elements that mark what they refer to as the *contours of Métis peoplehood*, or “Métis collective consciousness and ways of being” (18). The primary tenets of Métis peoplehood, of what brings Métis together as a collective people, are kinship and relatedness, mobility, and geography. Kinship pertains to the way Métis relate to and with one another, to non-Métis, and to the world around them. The latter of these refers to how Métis move through and occupy space and, lastly, to how they give meaning to place through developing connections to multiple landscapes. Métis people developed a shared consciousness of “expansive geographic familiarity” across “plains, parklands, woodlands, and the subarctic” (St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall 6–9). Métis “named the landscapes they occupied and shaped, and they created stories and songs linked to particular places, all of which rooted them to the new spaces they came to occupy” (St-Onge, Podruchny, and

Macdougall 10). In spite of the diversity of the geographical terrains that they occupied and shaped, Métis nevertheless developed an expansive understanding of their collective homelands.

In addition to shared consciousness of an expansive geography, Métis were therefore also born in and through their “tremendous physical and social mobility” (St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall 6–9). Métis created fixed communities across their homelands, but like many other Indigenous peoples, they continued to move through their territories in alignment with seasonal patterns. Community members came and went from fixed settlements at certain points in order to, among other things, hunt, trap, trade, and further develop social and political relations with other peoples. Métis therefore “lived and thrived at the intersection of mobility and fixedness” and are “neither nomadic nor settled but, rather, are both” (St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall 6–9). While the discourse around mobility as couched in the language of “nomadism” is often used to negate Indigenous peoples’ claims to land, as the authors argue, the complex interplay of fixedness and movement troubles any notion that Métis do not possess understandings of existing within a distinct and identifiable homeland. As Daniel Heath Justice notes in his work on Cherokee kinship and literature in *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*, Cherokee can develop relational roots to new homes, and their “Indigenousness and nationhood remain intact” (25). This is because while *where* an Indigenous people are may change—either by will or by force, or, in the case of the Métis, by an interplay of fixedness and mobility—the principles that undergird their “Indigenousness,” meaning the ways in which they relate to and make meaning of the spaces they inhabit, remain intact.

For Métis, Métis fixedness and mobility are both founded upon and encircled by principles of kinship that bind Métis together. A highly refined understanding of kinship as developed among the Métis people has long united the “far-flung and dispersed human elements into a coherent and functioning whole” (St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall 14). It has ensured the “maintenance of strong family ties across time and space” (St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall 9). Principles of kinship and a commitment to those principles mean that irrespective of where Métis people may find themselves “across time and space,” they remain united with one another in a shared, underlying ethos. As Macdougall writes in her sole-authored book *One of the Family*,

this is because in Métis understandings of kinship it is more than simply a matter of relationality, although this is surely important. Kinship extends into the realm of values and virtues. Macdougall writes that in the area of Sakitawak, Métis understood kinship through the framework of *wahkootowin*, which “conveys an idea about the virtues that an individual should personify as a family member,” values “such as reciprocity, mutual support, decency, and order” that “in turn influenced the behaviours, actions, and decision-making processes that shaped a community’s economic and political interactions” (*One* 8). *Wahkootowin* therefore provides Métis with an understanding of their relationships to one another and to all of creation across the wide range of their homeland.

While principles of *wahkootowin* speak to Métis human relations, they also extend beyond these. Embedded within *wahkootowin* are ethics for Métis relations “to the natural and spiritual worlds, regulating relationships between humans and non-humans, the living and the dead, and humans and the natural environment” (Macdougall, *One*). In light of this, Métis geographies are not just about occupancy of space but also, as alluded to before with respect to the notion that Métis name and build connections to place, about *how* Métis occupy and inhabit the spaces they create. Centrally, *wahkootowin* as a guiding principle of Métis spatial relations means that Métis peoplehood is rooted in ethical and respectful principles for living in a good way and in balance with the natural world, with the earth’s other inhabitants, and with other Métis and with one’s ancestors. The unique ways in which *wahkootowin* is conceived of and enacted by Métis extend across the homeland. Irrespective of where within the homeland Métis people may find themselves, they nevertheless remain connected to and with one another through this core way of being.

This is important to mention because these ways of understanding family, relationality, and responsibility have significantly contributed to Métis peoplehood, a peoplehood that sees people tied together by “shared types of historical processes” and not “the degree of Indian blood in their veins or number of Indians in the family tree” (Macdougall, “Myth” 423). This last point is important to mention, for if *wahkootowin* is foundational to Métis peoplehood, then it behooves us to center it in our readings of Métis literatures; in doing so, we can take an approach to Métis literatures that moves us away from literary criticism

that is overly preoccupied with reading for racial hybridity. Rather than reading Métis literatures for fragmented traces of “whiteness” and “Indianness,” we may begin to read for the “coherent and functioning whole” that St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall write about. This is also a move to decenter individualistic analyses of Métis literatures. By reading “through race,” Métis literary criticism overemphasizes the individual and pays little attention to the way in which Métis exist in relation to other Métis—to a distinct people. As such, while there are three core elements that serve as the backbone to Métis people’s distinctiveness, it is kinship and *wahkootowin* (herein spelled as *wahkohtowin*) that provide the foundation for Métis peoplehood. Given its centrality, it therefore offers a critical basis for conversations on Métis literatures; reading for *wahkohtowin* allows us to do the work necessary toward reclaiming Métis literatures as vital expressions of Métis peoplehood.

FROM FRAGMENTED TO WHOLE:

RECENTERING MÉTIS LITERATURES AND CRITICISM

The foundation provided by shared understandings of kinship allows for the continued transmission and regeneration of distinct Métis consciousness, something I will reflect on shortly with respect to Herb Belcourt’s work. First, however, I think it is important to reiterate that by engaging with emergent works in Métis studies we can come to recognize that Métis are the “first and best place to speak about who we are and what’s important to us” (Justice 209). In order to demonstrate why this is so, I now turn to a discussion of a text that is considered foundational in Native literature. Maria Campbell’s 1973 autobiography *Halfbreed* and the literary analysis that surrounds it demonstrate precisely why new approaches to reading Métis literatures are so desperately needed.

The mass printing of *Halfbreed* forged space for Métis and Halfbreed voices in literature. Since its publication *Halfbreed* has often been positioned as a key text in the trajectory of Native literature, principally in Native women’s writing. As influential as her text has been to other Indigenous peoples and to Indigenous writing widely, *Halfbreed* is, to be sure, a book about being a Halfbreed woman. *Halfbreed* is comprised of a series of stories deriving from Campbell’s lived experiences. While the book gave public voice to Campbell’s personal experiences, the

book is replete with insight into what constitutes Campbell as a member of a discernable Halfbreed/Métis people. While Campbell deploys the Anglophone term “Halfbreed” (Halfbreed also refers to, it can be argued, another distinct Indigenous population), she is nevertheless descended from and connected to Métisness. Insofar as Campbell recognizes her Grannie Dubuque as a treaty Indian, she recognizes herself and the community space she occupies as *Halfbreed* and makes brief reference to her time volunteering as a representative with the Metis Association of Alberta (132). Few analyses of *Halfbreed*, however, have been devoted to identifying what it is within the text that marks this consciousness as distinct from Cree, Saulteaux, Scottish, French, and so on and the unique existences of Halfbreedness and Métisness.

More directly related to this article, few critics of *Halfbreed* have considered how it might be an expression of a distinctly identifiable Michif, Halfbreed, and/or Métis sovereign intellectualism. The popular position appears to be to read *any* Métis presence in literature for its “mixedness”—reading for “parts” rather than reading for the “whole.” To ask that we give serious consideration to such things, to place Métis at the center of our analyses, is to affirm the viability of an approach to Métis literatures that recognizes Métis as possessing distinct yet adaptive and shifting ways of articulating self and community. It is to recognize that privileging “Indian perspectives in discourses by and about Indians isn’t to claim that those perspectives exist in a vacuum, or that they’re disconnected from historical and cultural influences beyond one’s own nation(s); it is, however, to insist on the ethical repositioning of Indian voices from the margins of that discourse firmly to the center” (Justice 212). Placing Métis at the center of our analyses also recognizes that the tendency of literary critics to try to delineate which aspects of the literature represent the “Cree influence” and which parts mark the “French influence” emerges because of the persistence of race-based thought (whether explicitly or implicitly marked).

More importantly, such approaches struggle to appreciate that reading and interpreting Métis literatures greatly benefit from understanding the complexities of Métis existences and their relationship to, and rootedness in, collectivism versus individualism. To understand the text as linked to a uniquely Métis Indigenous existence and as an expression of Métis intellectual sovereignty, it is necessary to discuss what it is within *Halfbreed* that would mark it as “uniquely Métis” while not

precluding that there are some facets of the text that make it readable as, for example, “uniquely Cree.” For instance, what is central to *Halfbreed* is something that is very much a marker not only of its Creeness but also of its Métisness—its emphasis on kinship and community. That this emphasis on kinship is central to Cree and their ways of being does not preclude us from understanding it as a “way of being” for Métis, because, as St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall point out, what is emblematic of Métis peoplehood is that the “Metis articulated and lived them differently” (10). While both Cree and Métis may have an understanding of the concept of *wahkohtowin*, Métis articulated their kinship, and their peoplehood in particular, differently.

Few critics appear poised to consider this. Kristina Fagan and colleagues, in an essay produced in concert with a graduate class, have created a thorough review of key literary criticism taken up since the publication of Campbell’s *Halfbreed*. The authors surmise that the majority of criticism regarding *Halfbreed* encourages an interpretation of the text in five key ways: (1) as a validation of “Native” literature; (2) as a symbol of nationalist Metis identity (here they draw on the word *Metis* without an accent in order to signal it as a broader/wider identity category); (3) as a banner text for hybridity; (4) as a resistant text directed at a non-Indigenous and/or white audience; and (5) as a community-building work for Aboriginal writers (Fagan et al. 268). In this summarization they missed the opportunity, however, to conclude with an affirmation of the validity of a Métis-specific reading practice, instead advocating for a “post-positivist realist” reading praxis that they feel may provide the room necessary for addressing the “multiple identity claims” that *Halfbreed* puts forward. That the only “Metis”-specific interpretations of the text that they are able to identify position *Halfbreed* as “symbol of nationalist Metis identity” that is both overly conflated and wholly politicized further highlights for us the gaps in readings of the text. The authors appear unable to identify or develop for themselves a reading of *Halfbreed* that is connected to Métis worldviews beyond that of “nationalism” and/or that takes into account the experience of Campbell and her people vis-à-vis the landscape of colonization as it has impacted Métis and Métis people’s existences and sense of self.

There is one text, however, that I have come across wherein the author tries to advance a reading of *Halfbreed* that does take seriously the question of Métis epistemology. Artist-scholar Dylan Miner tries to

advance a reading of *Halfbreed* through what he terms the “Halfbreed Theory” at work within the text. Although he should be commended for trying to elucidate what it is that makes Campbell’s *Halfbreed* “half-breed” beyond racial discourses, he overreaches in imagining a coterminous Halfbreed consciousness between his great-great-grandmother from Sudbury, Ontario, and Campbell and her people in Saskatchewan, even as he acknowledges the importance of context and specificity in his analysis. He bypasses a consideration of the differences between Campbell, her people, their unique existence, and their distinct history and his ancestor from many miles away and of a different time, someone whom we simply do not know enough about. They presumably share no clear community or familial links.

That he brings these two together, I think, could be the result of a sheer lack of published literature attending to Métis consciousness, but it is far more likely to be that, inasmuch as he tries to move beyond racial rhetoric, his analysis is undergirded by a perception of the “shared mixedness” of his ancestor and Campbell. There may be commonalities, as pointed out by Marieke Neuhaus in her readings for Michif linguistic expression in Campbell’s *Stories of the Road Allowance People*: “When I argue for reading Michif influences in Campbell’s *Stories of the Road Allowance People* as an expression of Métis intellectual sovereignty, this observation applies primarily to the Métis community that gave birth to these stories” (24). She does not close off the possibility, given the diversity among Métis, that “the performance of peoplehood enacted” in Campbell’s work might “speak” to other Métis communities; this would be very different from “speaking for” or assuming any sort of easy congruency or shared processes of peoplehood. It is thus exceedingly difficult to take Miner’s analysis of “Halfbreed Theory” at face value. If Miner’s Ontario-based ancestor and Campbell’s contemporary lived experiences in Saskatchewan are linked, that link appears only at the level of purported mixedness; if Métis peoplehood and Métis worldviews are created from kinship and relatedness, mobility, and geography, and Miner’s ancestor and Campbell share none of these, then his articulation of Halfbreed Theory is sorely lacking.

This further reflects the struggle of scholars to find a way to write on Métis literatures without deploying either overt or covert race-based thinking. Sophie McCall, in her recent chapter on Métis writing, also appears to struggle with Métisness. While she asserts a reading approach

to Métis literatures that seeks to balance what she refers to as “national” (Métis nationhood) and “diasporic” (Métis-sage) identifications, her analysis moves far too quickly over interpretations of Métis nationhood and appears to nevertheless be anchored in an understanding of all contexts for Métisness as derived from mixedness—as the products of *métissage* (McCall 21). She openly rejects the utilization of the language of hybridity but is dependent on notions of Métis-sage that imply nearly the same thing, still telling us little about how Métis conceptualize Métisness. McCall writes that *métissage* represents “an interval *between* different cultures and languages,” and Métis writing is “a way of *merging* and *blurring* genres, texts, and identities” (34, emphasis added). Her reflection on Gregory Scofield’s work demonstrates the tension I outline above, as she posits that his Métis nation building arises from his Cree foremothers and his father’s Jewish lineage rather than being constituted by those things in the text that represent his Métis nationhood irrespective of his supposed mixedness—marked, for example, by his relationship to his aunties and their mobility and adaptability, as well as his time at and his geographical connection to Batoche and the way he is perceived by First Nations as Métis.

The persistence of discourses of mixedness, often passed off through the language of *métissage*, perpetuates the already troubling dichotomy between colonizer/colonized by privileging rhetoric of mixedness that, as Andersen points out, *is* inherently racialized (*Métis* 10). The discourse of mixedness is problematic in that it is often used to assert that for Métis, “confusion [is] about their identity—and not the racist oppression that is a legacy of colonialism” (Episkenew 57). This ultimately leads to readers being ill informed of the complexity of both individual and collective Métis identity. That we are attuned to reading for confusion and not for racist oppression is, I believe, the product of not being taught to think of Métis as a people who have experienced the impacts of racism and colonization in ways distinct from, and yet shared with, other Indigenous peoples. We are rarely prepared to consider the most devastating ways in which colonization and race thinking have impacted and continue to impact Métis—the fracturing of perceptions of Métis identity and the attempts to divorce it from its communal roots.

Perceptions of Métis as mixed individuals negate the existence of Métis collectivities and the impacts of colonization on Métis peoples

and communities. For while it may be that Scofield's individual dislocation renders difficult his early articulation of his identity as Métis, this is certainly not the case with Campbell, even as she refers to herself as Halfbreed. A dislocated *individual* is not the same thing as a dislocated *community*, revealing the tensions in theorizing about Métis literatures in the absence of an understanding of the contours of Métis consciousness and both the veracity and elasticity of Métis families and communities. This is precisely why readings of Métis literatures must be grounded in an understanding of the specific contexts of the individual and his or her relationship to Métis communities. Reading *for* mixedness or *métissage* prevents us from looking for markers like these, markers of peoplehood that allow us to see Métis as whole. There is a marked difference between thinking of Métis as a "mixed people" and as a "whole people"—or, as Métis elder Tom McCallum has noted in relation to the term *wesahkotewenowak*, as a "new people" (Edge and McCallum 91). This is why we need to develop a greater understanding of Métis peoplehood. It is in recognition of such tensions that developments in Métis studies are important for helping literary scholars approach Métis literatures differently from what has been done in the past.

READING WAHKOHTOWIN:

HERB BELCOURT'S *WALKING IN THE WOODS*

As has been laid out above, analyses of Métis literatures have been fairly constrained by literary scholars' lack of familiarity with Métis people, history, culture, and so on. This has led to the pervasive spread of analyses rooted in race thinking. It is not impossible, however, to move beyond such a theoretical approach when we take seriously the contributions of the wider interdisciplinarity of Métis studies to our work in literary criticism. The work of Métis historians such as St. Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall can help us to reorient our analyses to be more reflective of the contexts within which Métis people exist in the world. Their work on core elements of Métis ways of being, on that which forms Métis collective consciousness and thus the existence of such an entity as "Métis people," such as *wahkohtowin*, lends a great deal to readings of Métis literatures. In order to further establish this, I now turn to a reading of *wahkohtowin* within Herb Belcourt's life narrative, *Walking in the Woods: A Métis Journey*.

In my direct line, my father, grandmother, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, and beyond grew up, lived in, and moved through Manitou Sakahiganak (Lac Ste. Anne) and other connected areas, including Wabamun, Duffield, St. Albert, and Amiskwachiwaskahigan (Beaver Hills House, Edmonton). This information is important to this conversation because Métis, like other Indigenous peoples, must know the stories of our peoples so that we can “return to a meaningful place within the web of relationships and responsibilities” (Justice 46). Without taking part in this responsibility, Justice writes, we bear no right of affiliation. My interest in Belcourt’s story, then, derives from recognizing that in order to fulfill my responsibilities as a Métis person, I need to demonstrate my relationship to the work that I do. In this context, it is important for me to contextualize my position in relation to Belcourt’s text. Belcourt and I, although we have never met, are tied together in a number of ways, and these connections make his work a logical point for me to begin working from. Indeed, as I sought to make sense of my identity as a Métis person and my connection to my family on the prairies and in the wider landscape of Métis people, I turned to Belcourt’s book not only because he writes about one of the areas that my great-great-grandmother is from (Lac Ste. Anne) but also because he is my third or fourth cousin. My great-great-grandmother is his relation, as she is first cousin to his relation, Victoria Belcourt Callihoo (Granny Belcourt); and my uncle is Granny Belcourt’s grandson. I am sure we are related in a number of other ways as well.

Belcourt anchors his story in his childhood home and the community of these people—the community of Lac Ste. Anne. Lac Ste. Anne is widely recognized as a historic Cree-speaking Métis community that was founded by Gabriel Dumont Sr., uncle of the more famous Gabriel Dumont, military strategist of the Métis Nation (Barkwell). By the early 1850s, Lac Ste. Anne was peopled by over two hundred Métis (Barkwell). As with the Métis communities of Fort Edmonton and St. Albert, Lac Ste. Anne was one of a number of strong Métis communities on the prairies. Although set geographically apart from the communities of Red River and Batoche, those communities often considered the heart of the Métis Nation, communities located farther west and north on the prairies thrived in their own right while nevertheless retaining strong familial, social, and economic ties with the Red River and Batoche areas. Insofar as Lac Ste. Anne had a number of different ties to Red River and

Batoche, it exists as a distinct place that gave rise to a strong Métis community and identity.

The glue of Métis identity and of community life in historic and contemporary Lac Ste. Anne, as with other Métis communities, lay in the role of kinship. In Belcourt's book we see the significance of kinship in the stories of his family, the stories of his relationships with Métis from other provinces, and the stories about the lands of Lac Ste. Anne. While Belcourt has himself moved away from Lac Ste. Anne, his narrative reflects the elasticity of Métis ways, which allow for shifts/movements from and back to Lac Ste. Anne without compromising who he is as a Métis person. *Walking in the Woods: A Métis Journey* documents Belcourt's return to Lac Ste. Anne. Through what he calls his "journey," he contextualizes his life through reflecting on, as Métis Nation of Alberta president Audrey Poitras writes in the foreword, "one family's identity" (5). This emphasis is made evident within the first few pages, as Belcourt begins his narrative by grounding himself in his kinship relations. He presents us with a segment of the Belcourt family tree that extends from his grandchildren to his great-great-great-great-grandparents, Jacques L'Hirondelle and Josephite Pilon. Paying specific attention to the emergence of the Belcourt line, it is a tree, he writes, that is "a simplified chart of much larger families," a tree with thousands of living descendants in the Edmonton area alone (Belcourt n.p.). In addition to providing a family tree, Belcourt incorporates numerous photographs throughout his text, including pictures of his parents, grandparents, siblings, partner (Lesley), and grandchildren. In one chapter subsection, he includes selections from a series of over thirty portraits that were taken of the Belcourt family between 1890 and 1914 by pioneer photographers in Edmonton. The final photograph of this section is not one of the pioneer photos but is instead a picture of his parents, Wilfred Belcourt and Florence Courtoreille, on their wedding day in 1929.

Belcourt's inclusion of genealogical information and family photographs demonstrates the way in which his family and the community he comes from, while anchored in Lac Ste. Anne, move through various spaces and times. From his acknowledgment of a wide network of descendants linked to the people of Lac Ste. Anne and spread throughout Edmonton, to his inclusion of family photographs taken at a studio in Edmonton, he reveals that Lac Ste. Anne's life in both past and present contexts extends beyond its borders. The original Métis and their

descendants are able to move through time and space without ceasing to be Métis or ceasing to exist in relation to Lac Ste. Anne. Familial kinship remains a strong, albeit elastic, tie that binds them to one another. His focus here is one way in which he emphasizes the significance of kinship to a telling of his life stories as a Métis person and to a grounding of his conversation on his family, his identity, and his homeland.

While such approaches are vital to grounding kinship within his narrative, perhaps the most significant way he emphasizes kinship within the book is through encouraging his family members to be active participants in the creation of the book. Although not Métis by birth, his partner, Lesley, is integrated into the web of Métis kinship through marriage and partnership and contributes by transcribing the oral accounts of Belcourt and his siblings. Lesley also writes a story near the close of the book that is based on stories she has collected from her time living within the Belcourt family. Belcourt also involves his siblings in the book's creation, encouraging his sisters to tell their stories, writing, "This project has been a family effort. I have asked my nine brothers and sisters to help me, and they have spoken into the same tape recorder, and found photographs and documents for this book, too. Lesley typed each one of our transcripts, making suggestions and asking more questions" (21). Taking up a similar approach as Belcourt in the early part of the book, his brother Gordon, the family genealogist, takes "his turn to speak" (168) and reflects on the various branches of relations the Belcourts connect to, sharing stories about his discoveries in his work on the Belcourt family tree. As with Gordon, his other siblings contribute to the book in order to tell their own stories while also providing a fuller picture of the Belcourt family and the Lac Ste. Anne area.

Belcourt asked his sisters to share what their lives were like in Lac Ste. Anne after he left home, so they collectively created a separate chapter titled "Sisters." In it, Belcourt notes that the sisters outnumber the brothers in their family, and so "their life experiences, and their memories of our family in Lac Ste. Anne, are an important part of the story I am trying to tell" (71). His sister Marie identifies the changes in being a Métis woman from their mother's generation to their own, stating that "in those olden days, men were the boss, and you did what you were told. Now things have changed. I am the boss of my own life" (72). Not only does Marie recount for readers what has taken place within their own family, but her reflections allude to changes within her wider commu-

nity. She points to the destabilizing of gendered norms that saw Métis women's autonomy eclipsed by Métis men. She provides us with insight into the ways in which her family and community were impacted by the introduction of patriarchy and the notion that women were subservient to men while also giving us insight into generational shifts that have restructured Métis women's lives, seeing them, as she writes, become the bosses of their own lives.

Marie reflects on shifts in the gender dynamic of her family, and while it is clear that indeed some important changes with respect to women's role within the family did occur, in another chapter in which Belcourt engages his brothers Ken, Gilbert, and Gordon, we are able to see that these changes did not affect important aspects of Métis family and social structure. For instance, Ken, Gilbert, and Gordon all inherited skills in hunting, trapping, and trading that allowed them to continue in the family's fur business, which had been passed down from their father. Their sister Georgina, on the other hand, inherited the skills needed to learn bookkeeping. Through this, Belcourt argues that the fur trade and their continued work within fur as a business are intimately linked to who they are as Métis: "The Métis built a national economy around this work" (133). What is salient here is that as the brothers inherited hunting, trapping, and trading knowledge, forms of labor traditionally associated with Métis men, sister Georgina was able to take on a role distinct from that which her female ancestors might have occupied. Métis women were the backbone of Métis family life and were charged with skinning and cleaning, as well as with child-rearing and household maintenance. Georgina's role as the family business's bookkeeper demonstrates the way in which the role of Métis women in her family has shifted. This shift, however, does not undermine the delicate balance of relations that is both characteristic of Métis families and necessary to their balanced functioning.

Additionally, the division of labor also reveals something for us with respect to the coexisting flows of mobility and fixedness that Métis were born from. Whereas the brothers necessarily live a kind of cyclical mobility through the very nature of their work within the fur business, Georgina, like Métis women before her, participates in a fixed mode of labor that grounds both the family and the business, locating them in a particular place. This speaks back to the points made earlier in this article with respect to the interplay between mobility and fixedness and

how kinship serves as the elastic that holds the Métis social structure together. This is further reflected in the emphasis Belcourt places on the presence of his grandchildren within the book. They are children who are adopted into his family and who did not grow up directly within Lac Ste. Anne, yet as the future of his family, he places them in prominence throughout the text. He asks them to propose the name for the work, and they come up with *The Magic Lake*, *The Loving Belcourt Family*, *The Belcourt Past*, and *The Belcourt Crystal Clear Lake* (19). Each of Amethyst's and Azlan's suggestions reflect the ties Belcourt is creating for them to place, to kin, to genealogy/history, and to Lac Ste. Anne. While he opts not to use Amethyst's and Azlan's suggestions, the name he chooses is even more profound and revealing, for he chooses to name the book for the day he asked them, a day he spent with them, walking in the woods, telling them stories of his childhood and building a familial and physical connection for them to Lac Ste. Anne.

It is important for him to ground his grandchildren in stories of Lac Ste. Anne because, as he reflects, "Métis families lived along the south shore 160 years ago, perhaps longer, back in the days when they were buffalo hunters, voyageurs, freighters, and fish suppliers on contract to supply the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Edmonton. Their descendants—people like me—feel a strong pull back to this place" (Belcourt 24). Belcourt affirms the centrality of the land with his comments and through his desire to foster a connection to Lac Ste. Anne for his grandchildren. At the same time, he continues to reflect on the mobility and elasticity of kinship ties—that Métisness, in this context, is not lost in the absence of a regular connection to place. In the narrative provided by his sisters, readers gain insight into why the family came to sell their property and move into the city, remarking that with the boys leaving for work in other places, there was too much work for the girls of the family to manage on their own (72). Farming on the prairies was difficult, even for the relatively affluent, but it was particularly challenging for families and communities confronted with endemic discrimination and poverty. Nevertheless, the bonds of kinship kept them together: "Some of the old Belcourt family traditions continued after the family moved to Edmonton. . . . Every Sunday the brothers and sisters, and their spouses and kids, would gather at our parents' home in Edmonton for a dinner of roast beef and lemon pies. They played cards and told stories. Dad would give our kids a dollar to come and give him

a kiss. They would line up in a row to kiss him” (Belcourt 74). A move to the city does not dissolve or diminish these bonds or Belcourt’s and his family’s Métisness because, as Macdougall and St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall have suggested, Métis identities are *spatial* identities that are highly flexible and mobile. In this way, kinship bonds act, as St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall write, like a pliable bond that holds people together across space and time.

This bond is further reinforced by the final portion of the book. The book comes to a close with an affirmation that while by and large it is “Herb’s story,” his story is inseparable from that of his family and community. Belcourt incorporates two of Victoria Belcourt Callihoo’s (1861–1966) contributions to the *Alberta Historical Review* in the back pages of his book. Belcourt Callihoo was, according to Belcourt’s genealogical chart, first cousin to his great-grandfather. In 1948 Granny Belcourt, as she was affectionately known, sat down for a series of oral history interviews. The interviews were published in 1953 and 1956. In the story titled “Early Life in Lac Ste. Anne in the 1870s,” Granny Belcourt discusses her life and that of her parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, reflecting on how maintaining family bonds have always been essential to the Otipemisiwak—the Cree-speaking Métis of Lac Ste. Anne. She describes how Métis from Lac Ste. Anne and nearby St. Albert interacted with one another, mentioning that larger visits were organized between each other once or twice a year. She notes that the two settlements were connected as relatives from the L’Hirondelle, Belcourt, Gladus, Plante, Laderoute, and Gauthier families. The Lac Ste. Anne community, although primarily interacting with St. Albert, also maintained good relations and annual visits with Métis in the Battle River area (Belcourt 200). This practice of visiting also reflects the mobility of Métis and the interplay between fixed community life and mobility predicated on kinship and other relations. Fixedness and mobility are broadened through Belcourt’s bridging of time wherein the centrality of *wahkohtowin* is reinforced by the inclusion of Granny Belcourt’s stories in their totality. By including her voice alongside others presented in the text, Granny Belcourt connects the stories she shares of herself, her parents, her grandparents, and her great-grandparents to the generation of Amethyst and Azlan. The stories of Granny Belcourt’s generation and beyond are made real as a set of living memories directly linked to both of Belcourt’s grandchildren.

CONCLUSION (BUT, MORE ACCURATELY, A BEGINNING)

Belcourt's *Walking in the Woods* is one of a growing body of Métis life stories that gives us insight into Métis expressions of peoplehood within specific family/community dynamics. Belcourt is situated within a web of relations extending from before Victoria Belcourt Callihoo to beyond his grandchildren's time. The connections he facilitates and bridges with his walk in the woods, along with the physical production of the text, make possible the survival of these family stories for generations. Steeped in the values of the Belcourt family and of the Lac Ste. Anne Métis community, Belcourt provides invaluable narrative insight into what it means to be a Métis person. As he reflects in the book on his struggles with racism and externally imposed shame, he never questions "who" he is. In the face of racism, Belcourt is made strong through knowing his place in the web of the Belcourt family—through his sense of being generated by a distinct form of kinship logic—through *wah-kohtowin*. His sense of self does not derive from racial logic. That his encounters with racism do not see him fall into an existential crisis regarding his Métisness is a testament to the ways that Métis kinship ties make one whole and strong. Even as community members come to move away from Lac Ste. Anne there are ways in which they remain bound together, their Métisness remains intact, and they do as Métis have always done—adapt, persist, and endure.

All of this is to say that what I am primarily asking for here is that we place Métis at the center of Métis writing, that we try to read life narratives, whether nonfiction or fiction, in ways more respectful than deeply raced notions of hybridity. I ask that we read Métis as "whole" people and that we "read for wholeness" rather than picking over or imagining the presence of (at times purportedly irreconcilable) parts of Métisness in literary texts. This will, I hope, help us to more effectively respond to Episkenew's criticisms, which ask us to move away from positioning Métis identities *as confused*, understanding, rather, that outsider visions of Métis and the past and present imposition of racialized, colonialist thought are *confusing* to Métis peoples—peoples who, like Scofield, for instance, once resituated in community contexts and immersed in "Métis collective consciousness," find healing.

I am also asking that we draw on the wonderful insights of scholars in Métis studies in our analyses of Métis literatures to gain fuller under-

standings of Métis consciousness. In order to understand Métis literatures, it is vital that we widen our frame of reference and, wherever possible, become better informed about the broader landscape within which Métis literature arises. This can be done by trying to look through Métis eyes—by familiarizing ourselves with Métis perspectives on historical, political, cultural, and social contexts, but also with oral stories and material culture. While kinship is a common theme within Indigenous literatures, as St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall point out, it is the way in which Métis enact them that helps us to understand who they are. This is a sore spot for many working in Métis studies—that, given the powerful influences of racial rhetoric that people have embedded within themselves (Métis not being excluded from the effects of this), few have thought to look to Métis and to consider what it is that makes us a wholly distinct and recognizable Indigenous *people*. Ultimately, I put forth that references to kinship ties and the sharing of life experiences and observations within Métis literatures such as Belcourt's reveal that Métisness or "being Métis" is constituted by more than conceptualizations of individual identity. Métis literatures represent Métisness as whole, both localized and community-based, and as reflective of broader, continuous (yet shifting) dynamic and conscious expressions of Métis peoplehood.

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NOTES

1. It is important to note here that the term *Halfbreed* has a complex historical trajectory through which it became ensconced as a term of self-identification for many people. Further, in the Red River area people formed community around a shared sense of Halfbreedness. While the term may appear offensive to those ill informed of the process of community identity formation in the Red River and surrounding areas, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge this presence. For the purposes of this article I will blur the lines between this distinction in order to make a more widespread case for denouncing a *métissage*, or mixed-based approach, to Métis lit-

eratures, while elsewhere I make a case for reading Métis literatures and Halfbreed literatures separately to attend to the unique and overlapping ways in which community is constituted in both sites of literary production.

2. For an expanded discussion of the construction of Métis as “mixed-race,” see Andersen (2014).

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Rewriting *Billie* and Asserting Rhetorical Sovereignty in Linda Hogan's *Power*

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Legal situations in American Indian literatures reveal how Native peoples actively resist the imposed paternalistic federal Indian policy that diminishes their sovereignty. One such example is Linda Hogan's *Power* (1998), which rewrites the legal case *United States v. James E. Billie* (1987) from an indigenous perspective. In *Billie*, Seminole tribal chairman James E. Billie was charged with violating the Endangered Species Act (1973) after he hunted a protected Florida panther. While the court case in *Power* similarly revolves around a Native tribe member's killing of a panther and her violation of the Endangered Species Act, the novel's larger concern is the tangle of tribal and federal laws undermining Native self-governance. Hogan broadens the relevance of the case by changing the tribe at the center of the novel. Instead of depicting Seminoles—which would enable readers to recall narratives written by European Americans about Seminoles in Florida from the Spanish conquest to the *Billie* case—*Power* focuses on the fictional Taiga tribe. In *Power*, Ama, an older Taiga member, kills a Florida panther as part of a ritual for her tribe's cultural renewal and ultimately faces two trials and two different outcomes. Ama is acquitted under U.S. law in a federal courtroom but exiled by the Taiga tribal council, which convenes in Kili Swamp. In this article, I argue that by reimagining *Billie*, presenting two trials and the questions they raise about power and justice, and contrasting rhetorical imperialism exercised within the federal court with Native rhetorical sovereignty in the tribal court, *Power* resists U.S. federal Indian policy's erasure of Native sovereignty. Whereas U.S. law subordinates Native sovereignty to a state of dependency, Hogan's counternarrative envisions Native control over their identities and definitions.

Indeed, Hogan critiques long-standing and intertwined historical and legal narratives that systematically shape federal Indian policy, which in turn undermines Native nations' survival. Because the novel raises a number of issues relevant to the environment, previous scholars have understandably engaged with *Power* through ecocritical perspectives.¹ However, I emphasize the social, historical, and political contexts in which the novel takes shape. To read the representation of environmental concerns without these contexts risks reiterating "unstated assumptions [that] can mischaracterize the real makeup of Native communities and reactivate the old ethnographic-formal model" of interpreting American Indian literatures, which focuses on texts' formal properties in limited cultural contexts (Lyons, "Actually Existing" 279). In contrast, I interpret *Power* by centering the notion that while "federal Indian law" serves as a "force in the colonizing of Native tribes, or nations," American Indians resist that force through multitudinous rhetorical practices (Cheyfitz 6). Relevant and prominent sites of resistance leading up to Hogan's novel include the Red Power movement and American Indian Movement (AIM). These activist conversations about Native sovereignty inform Scott Richard Lyons's concept of "rhetorical sovereignty," codified in his essay in 2000, which calls for Native communities to control their communicative needs. While previous scholars of contemporary Native American fiction have analyzed courtroom scenes and the assertion of jurisdiction in texts like Winona LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman* (1997) and Leslie Marmon Silko's "Tayo's Story" (1975) as sites of negotiating rhetorical sovereignty (Katanski 63, 68), Hogan's novel has not yet received this attention. This article seeks to restore Hogan and *Power* to a tradition of Native writers working alongside scholars and activists developing rhetorical sovereignty as a concept and asserting its reach in the late twentieth century. In so doing, I conclude this article by reflecting how my own interpretive practices participate in the crafting of pedagogical and methodological frameworks grounded in rhetorical sovereignty.

To that end, I situate *Power* in conversation with the original court case upon which it is based and the historical newspaper reports of the trial. I delineate how the novel extracts the *Billie* case and its portrayal in news media from a larger rhetorical situation that dispossesses Native peoples of their agency. The legal and societal discourses generated by and concerning *Billie* do not elucidate to a U.S. audience the key issues

in the relationship between the U.S. government and Native nations that inform the court case. These issues include the power of Native peoples to set the terms and definitions of their sovereignty, a struggle that stretches from the Marshall Trilogy of cases in the 1830s and continues after the actual *Billie* case. The portrayal of *Billie* in *Power* illuminates not only Native peoples' use of rhetorical techniques to challenge the U.S. federal government's power to define Indians but also the way that their rhetorical actions secure the sovereignty and vitality of indigenous communities. By extending jurisdiction of the court case to the Taiga community, Hogan models and perpetuates rhetorical sovereignty, "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit [for self-determination], to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty" 459–50, emphasis original). Although the Taiga exercise rhetorical sovereignty through their tribal court, Hogan does not present the Taiga and their utilization of power free from critique.

As a term, rhetorical sovereignty "addresses [the] language and rhetoric concerning Native peoples and wishes to place control over that language and rhetoric . . . in Native nations' hands" (King, "Speaking Sovereignty" 79). Ever since Chief Justice John Marshall in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) defined American Indian tribes as "domestic dependent nations" and the relationship of the tribes to the United States as that of a "ward to his guardian" (*Cherokee Nation*), Native Americans have fought to preserve the right to autonomy and sovereignty based on their own collective identification and self-definition as nation-peoples. In international law, the treaty serves as a means to exercise nationhood and recognize national sovereignty (Barker 4). With this precedence, settlers, by entering into treaty negotiations with tribes, recognized indigenous peoples as nations. However, national legislation, military action, and judicial decision often negated recognition of indigenous peoples' sovereignty, status, and rights established through this treaty-making mechanism. The Marshall Trilogy of cases evinces these contradictions within recognition-by-treaty histories (6).

Marshall's definitions shape modern federal Indian law such that, as Peter D'Errico asserts, "'tribal' peoples" are presented as having "a lesser form of 'sovereignty,' which is not sovereignty at all, but dependence" ("American Indians" 242). *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* and *Worcester v.*

Georgia (1832)—part of the Marshall Trilogy of cases in the 1830s—exemplify rhetorical imperialism, “the ability of dominant powers to assert control of others by setting the terms of debate” (Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty” 452). Lyons explains “setting the terms of debate” by tracing the evolving definitions of sovereignty outlined in “writing by white powers” (452). In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, Marshall asserted that “the Cherokee Nation’s ‘relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian’” (452). Marshall’s rhetoric, referenced as the “plenary power doctrine and trust or protectorate relationship” in subsequent cases and legislation, outlined indigenous peoples’ “relationship to the U.S. as wholly subjected and conquered” (Barker 10). “Indian tribes,” Marshall asserted, “were not foreign nations or state governments” (10) and thus not part of the realm of international law (11). Marshall’s rhetoric, then, broke “any implied link between treaties, nationhood, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdiction that the United States would be obligated to recognize in Indians” (11). Joanne Barker argues that in *Worcester v. Georgia*, Marshall viewed the Cherokee as possessing “partial and limited powers as dependents under the more supreme governing authority” of the United States (12). A more comprehensive analysis of U.S. political and legal exchanges with indigenous communities reveals that “ward” came to replace “sovereign,” “tribe” replaced “nation,” and “agreement” replaced “treaty” (Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty” 452).

Similarly, U.S. legal language differs from Native Americans’ conceptualization of themselves as nations and peoples. Whereas sovereignty conceived by Western powers centers around individualism and the nation-state, sovereignty for Native communities focuses on their identity as nation-people. “People” refers to a collective group that shares history, language, or culture, and “[i]t has always been from an understanding of themselves as a people that Indian groups have constructed themselves as a nation” (Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty” 454). When decisions are made for the survival of the people, the guiding structure and logic are better defined as nation-people as opposed to nation-state (455). The evolution of U.S. legal terms to define Native communities and the ensuing structure of the conversation regarding tribal sovereignty efface Indian nations’ own rhetoric in that very conversation. This erasure of Native rhetoric occurs when legal and political dis-

courses promote a view of Native peoples as dependent and possessing limited powers.

Rhetorical situations, such as case law documents and summaries of trials in the popular press or mass media, may not explicitly communicate to a wider audience the power of indigenous communities' rhetorics. Like other bodies of literature, American Indian literature faces constraints. One cannot overlook the infrastructure of the publishing industry in shaping what texts circulate in public. Still, I want to emphasize that various modes of communication generate different conceptualizations and understandings of Native Americans within the U.S. settler colonial state. I would like to suggest, then, a return to Native American novels that include legal proceedings. This return necessitates looking for the ways in which characters, and by extension the writers themselves, assert their presence and the powerful, ongoing exercises of sovereignty and rhetorical self-determination. Examples include Abel on trial in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and Thomas Builds-the-Fire in Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993); the parallel Western and indigenous trial scenes in LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* (2001); courtroom scenes in Gerald Vizenor's novels; and navigation of the U.S. court system in James Welch's *The Indian Lawyer* (1990).

Works like these that deal with law afford literary critics an opportunity to take up Lyons's more recent call for Native American and indigenous studies to "accurately describe the people, communities, and nations they want to study" by "dealing with the fact that actually existing Indian nations . . . are already modern and diverse. And, of course, colonized" ("Actually Existing" 305). One must bear witness to "what *is*, in an actually existing sort of way without the discourses of assimilation or authenticity attempting to discredit it" (303, emphasis original). Hogan is a Chickasaw novelist, poet, essayist, activist, and former writer in residence for the Chickasaw Nation. As southeastern tribes, Chickasaws have cultural ties to Seminoles. Unlike many other American Indian writers, Hogan does not adhere to an ethnographic entrapment model in her writing. She does not write only about Chickasaws and thus the specific tribal nation of which she is a citizen. Her work poses challenges for literary criticism that centers national indigenous sovereignty. Her break in *Power* from an ethnographic model, I argue, strategically elucidates tensions in critical reading practices of Ameri-

can Indian literatures. In line with the ethnographic-formal model, one can historicize the tribe at the center of a text. In providing this thick description, one risks overlooking contemporary lived experiences of that “actually existing Indian nation” and not bearing witness to that tribe’s survival, modernity, and diversity. As I analyze later, Ama in *Power* asserts her rhetorical self-determination in the face of federal Indian policy that tries to define her based on discourses of assimilation and authenticity.

To interpret trial scenes as sites for negotiating rhetorical sovereignty reveals how actually existing Indian nations’ scholarship, creative output, and communal activism work in tandem with one another to secure social justice for Native peoples. Hogan’s work in constructing this concept of rhetorical sovereignty through *Power* had a sense of urgency that one can only now come to appreciate given subsequent developments in the historical trajectory of legislation on Native self-determination and sovereignty. While legal rhetoric defined Native Americans’ status as sovereign groups, it was not until 1996 that Native government officials met with the Department of State, the official department for government-to-government communication, to discuss the Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (D’Errico, “Native Americans” 10). The U.S. government did not endorse the declaration, citing concerns that the plural form of “indigenous peoples” and the term “self-determination” would raise questions about the possibility of Native nations gaining independent statehood (Suagee 365–66, 376, 380–82). It reassessed its position in 2010 and lent support to the official declaration (U.S. Department of State 1). As some critics noted, the U.S. government’s initial rejection of the draft sent a message that it did not seriously consider the views of American Indian tribes, especially regarding the politics between language and government (Suagee 366). Indeed, the declaration itself does not use the word “sovereignty.” With this omission, the document itself remains rhetorically constrained.

Native scholarship and activism, like the Red Power movement and AIM of the 1960s and 1970s, influenced these government-to-government and nation-to-nation developments. AIM activists’ goals included protection of homeland security and recognition of national indigenous sovereignty (Johnson 10). Such activism raises awareness regarding federal encroachment of sovereignty and the encroachment

of states and settlers onto Indian lands or into Indian issues (16). Additionally, Native critics, especially since the 1980s, have been developing “nationalist” methodologies that draw on Robert Warrior’s concept of “intellectual sovereignty” (124; Cheyfitz 103). Such nationalist approaches call for scholarship attuned to Native peoples’ historic and ongoing calls for political sovereignty. Warrior, writing from within indigenous communities, asserts that to practice “intellectual sovereignty” necessitates an understanding that “the struggle for sovereignty is . . . a process of asserting the power we possess as communities and individuals to make decisions that affect our lives” (124). Intellectual sovereignty enables Native critics to enter different dialogues “with both a pro-Indian awareness of [collective] strength and an openness to what the experiences of others have to teach” (124).

The concept of rhetorical sovereignty arises out of this scholarly, political, and legal milieu, but literary critics have not analyzed how Hogan’s novel theorizes such concerns and makes intelligible to an audience ongoing indigenous claims for self-governance. To borrow Lyons’s words regarding the relationship between activism, awareness, and federal Indian policy in the last few decades, “There’s a line that can be drawn here, although it would be by no means a direct or unbroken line” (“Actually Existing” 299). To read American Indian novels that depict trial scenes, like *Power*, through the framework of rhetorical sovereignty requires mapping the line that can be drawn between the history of the construction of “Indian” images and the language, rhetoric, and representation employed by settlers and Indians to formulate policy. It is no mere coincidence that Eric Cheyfitz quotes *Power* in an epigraph to his “The (Post)Colonial Construction of Indian Country: U.S. American Indian Literatures and Federal Indian Law”: “Here it doesn’t matter what was decided in the marble building in town. It doesn’t matter what’s written on paper. The old people are the ones who know the laws of this place, this world, laws stronger and older than America” (Hogan 160). Hogan’s novel, I argue, underscores the notion that when imposed European American legal definitions contradict the meaning of sovereignty as conceived by Native nations, literary responses can offer a more accurate understanding of sovereignty as peoplehood and the continuation of a community’s way of life.

Power reveals how the terms set by dominant white powers in cases like the Marshall Trilogy and U.S. legislation inform *Billie*. While

the novel makes these concerns of control over representation, self-determination, and rhetorical power explicit, legal and newspaper documents about the actual court case upon which the novel is based do not. One contemporaneous Florida newspaper reported that *Billie* raises questions about “the rights of Native Americans to carry on age-old traditions without interference from the federal government” (Mayer 1B). A piece in the *New York Times* indicated that presiding U.S. District Judge James C. Paine did not air in the courtroom a number of constitutional issues that the case raised when he ruled that “Seminole Indians’ sovereign nation status did not exempt them from Federal laws governing endangered species” (“Mistrial” A32). Newspaper reports like these do not examine the implications of the U.S. court’s setting the terms of debate by identifying Seminoles as a sovereign nation, nor do they discuss this power in the larger trajectory of the relationship between the U.S. government and Indians. Indeed, many newspapers mostly summarized the trial’s proceedings.

Court documents reveal that James E. Billie claimed that as a Seminole he was exempt from the Endangered Species Act. Second, he contended that the act did not apply to noncommercial hunting on the Seminole reservation and that upholding the act would abrogate his right to hunt and fish on the reservation. Finally, Billie argued that the act violated his right to freedom of religion. He asserted that he was training as a medicine man, and the court heard evidence regarding the role of panthers in Seminole religious practices. The key to the decision was criminal intent insofar as Billie argued that he did not decide what to do with the carcass until it was seized. At that point, he decided to give the gift to a medicine man to receive more instruction on Seminole religious practices (*United States v. James E. Billie*). The trial eventually ended with a hung jury, and Billie was acquitted (Klinkenberg 5D; “Tribal” A29). In addition to providing a more thorough analysis of the events than the newspapers, legal documents like the *Billie* trial record delineate the preceding court cases that informed the judge’s decisions. Still, like the newspapers, the court document, written by dominant powers, does not create space for what indigenous communities want from writing. Rhetorical sovereignty calls for indigenous peoples to “have some say about the nature of their textual representations” and “to determine their own communicative needs and desires in the pursuit of self-determination” (Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty” 458, 462).

Power does not explicitly reference *Billie*; however, through its fictionalization of the case, the novel intervenes in European American discourse about Indians that emerges out of legal, popular, and sometimes even academic discourses. In so doing, the novel provides powerful Indian rhetoric against colonialism. As with the actual case, the narrative in *Power* takes place in Florida, and it deals with the rights of a Native community to maintain its traditions without government interference. These traditions include the Taiga's spiritual beliefs and worldview, especially in terms of the power of storytelling and song and respect for the land. A hurricane ruins both the white community's landscape and Kili Swamp. Ama, a female elder and the character analogous to Billie, believes that the storm and industrialization have set the world out of balance. To balance the world, Ama enacts the events of the Taiga creation story, in which a woman sacrifices a panther for cultural revival. Ama's act violates two sets of laws. She is tried for violating the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, she is subject to the law of the Taiga elders, who punish her for not following the tradition of returning the panther skin to them. A jury in the federal courtroom finds Ama not guilty on the grounds that there is not sufficient evidence beyond a doubt, but she meets a different fate within her tribal community. Omishto, a sixteen-year-old girl and Ama's distant relative who lives in town, witnesses Ama's act. The elders listen to Omishto's testimony around a fire in Kili Swamp, outside of any European American courtroom and legal framework, and banish Ama to walk for four years. Unlike Billie, Ama does not plead her innocence, neither arguing that she is exempt from the Endangered Species Act nor claiming protection for religious purposes under the First Amendment.

By reimagining *Billie* with Ama and Omishto at the center and then extending jurisdiction of the case to the Taiga community, Hogan shifts legal authority from U.S. law to a tradition grounded in community, storytelling, and a connection to the land. Hogan contrasts rhetorical imperialism exercised in the U.S. court with rhetorical sovereignty upheld in the tribal court by depicting how the ideology that guides the white community's relationship to the land also shapes their interactions with and misunderstandings of the Taiga. This tension comes to light in the federal courtroom. The relationship with the land as an exploitable resource for self-betterment and advancement reflects the individual-based ideology that organizes the white community. The

Taiga, however, uphold notions of community and collective belonging. The depiction of another Taiga tribal court decision early in the novel establishes the importance of each tribe member's commitment to communal well-being. When the tribal elders hear that a member, Abraham Swallow, beats his wife and children and kills does out of season, they sentence him to death with their "songs and thoughts" (Hogan 15). The powerful verdict inspires young Taiga men to move to Kili Swamp and "to learn Taiga ways" from the elders (14).

Hogan further draws out the contrasts between conceptions of nationhood and power through Omishto's struggle with the justice of, on the one hand, the townspeople killing animals and destroying the natural environment yet not being held accountable for their acts, and, on the other hand, Ama's trial for killing the panther. This questioning of legal standards and justice recalls Lyons's assertion in reference to changing rhetoric defining Indian communities: "[H]e who sets the terms sets the limits" ("Rhetorical Sovereignty" 452). In the courtroom, it is as if Ama and the Taiga speak another language than the white community in terms of their relationship with the land and animals. Because the dominant group holds power, they set the limits; they maintain and carry out a legal system based on their views and dictate Ama and the Taiga's views as incommensurable with their law. Omishto highlights the tension between tribalism and the dominant white culture in *Power* when she indicates that the non-Indian community and the judge view Ama as a marginalized other, a dark woman they find strange. However, if "it were a man who shot a cat, a white man, he'd be free to come and go as he pleased. He'd be called a hunter" (Hogan 112). Likewise, Omishto observes that the judge's "eyes reflect contempt, more than they should, not in keeping with the crime" (136). The judge, Omishto realizes, does not hate Ama's crime; rather, he hates the woman, whom he deems incompatible with the non-Indian community.

The lawyers' questions also betray European American imposed conceptions of Indian identities. The prosecutor questions whether Ama is "full-blooded Taiga" or a "traditional" Indian, since she does not live in Kili Swamp. As Omishto observes, "Some people think that [tradition] means old-fashioned or superstitious" (Hogan 134). For the Taiga, it does not matter whether Ama is "full-blooded" or whether she lives in Kili Swamp; what matters is her investment in the well-being of the Taiga people. Instead of answering the court's questions, aimed at defin-

ing and limiting her, Ama asserts a single narrative: that she killed the panther. Ama's assertion of one narrative in the courtroom challenges the written laws, derived from the dominant culture's power and view of Indians as alien and inferior. The courtroom, then, is the very scene of disenfranchisement, the "very building of power that [the Taiga's] land and lives were signed away not that long ago" (136). However, Kili Swamp, an alternate space where the Taiga's relationship to the land exemplifies a "commitment to place that makes rhetorical sovereignty an empowering device for all forms of community" (Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty" 457), serves as an additional means for Hogan to envision Native rhetorical sovereignty.

Native rhetorical sovereignty transforms words into actions. By disrupting the dominant culture's historically maintained relationship between language, narrative, and law, Hogan promotes this kind of sovereignty as a countermeasure to the ongoing forces of colonization. *Power* challenges disempowerment and models a Native community's control over language, rhetorics, and the resulting jurisprudence by depicting the Taiga tribe's sovereignty as a self-defined, self-articulated Native concept based on social contracts and communal activism rather than federal legalisms. It is self-articulated in that the Taiga elders and not the federal government ultimately have the power to decide who belongs to their tribe and the grounds upon which to base this recognition. Through the motif of different "worlds," Hogan contrasts the guiding structures that organize the Taiga community in Kili Swamp and the nonindigenous inhabitants of the main town, which circumscribes "land [that] was taken out of [Kili] swamp to build a road. Stolen more than borrowed" (5). Omishto's observation that Ama's lifestyle seems disjointed from the European American inhabitants' world encapsulates the challenge Hogan sets forth for readers: to see the way that institutions and writing impose certain interpretations upon Indians. A kerosene lamp in Ama's window "makes you think that Ama, like the rivers, dropped out of time and that the houses of towns and suburbs have not crept forward, draining the swamps ahead of them, filling them in with soil, trying to make our world run even farther away from them until it's gone altogether" (8). This passage highlights the destruction of one world in the wake of supposed progress and development in another. Additionally, on the one hand, the phrase "dropped out of time" envisions indigenous cultures and peoples as static, when, as Lyons indicates,

“the pursuit of sovereignty is an attempt to revive not [Natives’] past, but [their] possibilities” (“Rhetorical Sovereignty” 449). On the other hand, the phrase calls readers’ attention to the possibility of the Taiga, and Native communities more generally, carving out spaces and developing and adapting their communities alongside the dominant culture. As Omishto continues, the Taiga have not run; though they appear “silent,” “nearly invisible,” and “pushed up against the wild places,” they maintain their sense of peoplehood in this space that the dominant community sees as wild, inferior, or the Other (Hogan 8). Hogan tasks readers to peel back the layers of the Taiga’s world and seek to understand it, just as Omishto wrangles with her place among the white community and the Taiga, what she has learned in school and the stories and beliefs of the Taiga, and justice among often contradictory laws.

The court case in the novel, then, is part of something much bigger. Hogan consciously weaves into the main narrative the different issues related to sovereignty and self-determination so that by the time readers reach the federal trial scene, they realize, like Omishto, that the trial is “more than if [Ama is] insane or not, if she killed the cat or not” (121). Ama’s crime is one “created by history” (183). From the tribe’s perspective, the traditional panther story and its emphasis on self-sacrifice for cultural renewal explain Ama’s act. Here, history refers to the tradition of federal Indian law and discursive practice. As Omishto notes, the non-Native protesters who take up the Taiga’s reverence for animals—“the children of those who were alive from the deaths of others”—proceed to judge the Taiga community by not understanding what these beliefs entail. This misrecognition then turns Ama into a monster in their eyes. Yet these protesters “do not see themselves or know their own history” (138). This history, then, also includes Spanish conquistadors like Juan Ponce de León and their destruction, whose lasting effects remain throughout the centuries, as well as American invasions. At one point, Omishto remarks that her sister’s locket reminds her that “the Americans invaded us for gold” (215).

Ama refuses the definitions of the lawyers and the court. The prosecutor asks her a series of questions, and she responds simply “yes” or “no” each time. Perhaps Ama refuses to utter more because she realizes that in the colonial contact zone of the courtroom, the outsiders have already judged her. This recognition also dawns on Omishto when she watches the jury judge Ama. She could tell them that she and Ama

“traveled through the storm, through drowned trees, covered in mud, that in the swamps that surround them, their houses, their children, an older world exists, a hungry panther, a woman who doesn’t think like them” (Hogan 131). Omishto realizes that although the Taiga live all around the non-Indian community, none will actually respond to and believe these truths. The courtroom can serve as a site of understanding between the two communities, but the courtroom audience enters the space with their own preconceived notions and definitions of Indian identities. They enter seeking reification of this romanticized image of Indians and as a result do not meaningfully engage with Ama.

By refusing to let the law fit her actions into a contained narrative, Ama asserts a form of rhetorical sovereignty that counters the historical and legal narratives that the novel indicates have defined Taiga community—the very narratives that shape the audience’s judgment of Ama. On the stand, Ama refuses to “aspire to the verifications and explanatory narratives of the law” (Manning 5). Ama’s lawyer poses questions to allow her to justify her act to the courtroom. Ama refuses to translate herself for the jurors or the courtroom audience; when questioned about the panther, she admits that she “slayed it” and “killed it” (Hogan 135), but she does not justify her actions by claiming the right to freedom of religion. The lawyer asks her if it could have been a deer that she killed, but she confesses that she recognized the panther based on its eyes. Her refusal to participate in this legal discourse and “appeal to the right excuses (Native American hunting and fishing rights or religious freedom),” make her “incomprehensible to the power system” (Manning 7). The prosecutor’s question of whether Ama is a full-blooded Taiga and the lawyers’ inquiry about the location of the panther slaying, to prove whether the incident occurred on a reservation, reflect the top-down system of federal recognition of Native peoples. From blood quantum to the recognition process of land and treaties, this federal discourse of law establishes the political and legal framework for Native sovereignty.

While Hogan models the novel after the case, her choice to give Ama the power to challenge the combined federal legal and cultural discourse with her own set of words, however minimal, exemplifies the novel’s ability to raise awareness to a U.S. audience of the different rhetorical practices and changes that Native peoples set into motion. If Ama chooses to “appeal to the right excuses” outlined by the system of

federal Indian policy, then she may perpetuate this system of rhetorical imperialism. In turn, she risks not securing sovereignty from within her community given the audience's inability to see beyond their stereotypes, to listen to her speak her community's needs, and to recognize how federal legal discourse uses Western interpretations to define "Indians" and "Native sovereignty." But she resists. Although her act remains incomprehensible to the court, her refusal to play along with the judiciary system is an act of resistance, challenging with few words the kudzu-like words that attempt to speak for her and define her identity and by extension her diverse community.

Ama's strategic rhetoric as a form of resistance is a critical departure from Billie's appeals to religious and tribal customs and argument that as a Seminole Indian he was exempt from the Endangered Species Act. Billie navigated the language and culture of the European American courtroom and the rhetorical imperialism of federal legal discourse. To simply see Billie's engagement with the U.S. court as automatically participating in rhetorical imperialism overlooks the ways in which Native peoples have used legal rhetorics to assert their sovereignty in the context of ongoing settler colonialism. The question that arises, then, is, What is missing in the conversation? Here, conversation refers to the discourse surrounding the *Billie* case, which is inscribed into public consciousness via newspapers and maintained perhaps communicatively in collective memory. Given their constraints, legal documents and mass press may not reveal to an audience the colonial logics that undergird federal Indian policy. Lisa King, delineating rhetorical sovereignty pedagogy, asserts that often discussions do not interrogate the constructed nature of the images and ideas depicting Indians nor address the historically unbalanced power relationship surrounding these constructions ("Sovereignty" 17). Hogan responds through *Power* to what remains unspoken, as well as to these problems, tensions, and limitations. In this vein, Hogan's text remains an exploration of rhetorical sovereignty strategies that sit alongside other rhetorical practices, like using legal rhetoric to assert sovereignty.

Ama's testimony also challenges another discourse that poses a challenge to Native self-determination: anthropological narratives. Since Ama refuses to be defended, her lawyer stops asking questions and asserts a justification for her: he "says it's because she believes in balance in the universe" (Hogan 135). Yet Ama never told the lawyer about her

beliefs. Instead, he relies on the anthropologist who studies the Taiga people for his understanding. The lawyer and the anthropologist correctly identify events in the panther woman narrative. The panther woman kills the panther to restore balance in the world, and Ama bases her actions on the story. The anthropologist's explanation, however, spoken aloud in the courtroom, "sounds stupid and childlike, not at all what it really is" (135). The anthropological narrative translates Ama's beliefs for the courtroom audience within historically constructed discourses on Native peoples. Omishto highlights this tension when she thinks, "I don't like the way the lawyer says 'Their world'—as he calls it—is different than 'ours,' meaning the one he and others like him have been shaped by, have inhabited. He tries to make us different and not ever to be understood" (136). The lawyer's terms encapsulate how anthropological narratives can erase the modernity of Native communities by inscribing Indians as thriving only in the past.

The way that the anthropologist's words shape the lawyer who then tries to define and limit Ama reflects indigenous peoples' lived and ongoing experiences. While Native peoples continue to assert themselves in public discourse and define their sovereignty as nation-peoples, they also combat European American cultural and historical narratives, such as the "vanishing Indian" narrative, that continually shape federal Indian policy. The vanishing Indian narrative—the notion that under the pressures of "civilized" societies, tribes and their citizens would disappear (Fort 309)—has produced "an image of Indians as elements of [America's] past—tragic, noble even, but no longer around" (Stromberg 7). This narrative has at its core the image of an Indian as noble savage, or "a pristine Indian or tribe from before contact, which represented all that was good about indigenous peoples" (Fort 309). By referencing different European American colonial conquests of Taiga lands and the destruction of the Taiga people, Hogan elucidates how historical narratives inscribe the vanishing Indian narrative—rehearsed, as Ernest Stromberg writes, in "numerous representational texts from government policies to cinematic Westerns"—into the American social imagination (7). The colonial history and the colonial rhetoric of law in the novel are not mere coincidence; it is this very history and process that *Power* challenges.

By demarcating "their" and "our" worlds, the lawyer rehearses such narratives; he does not bear witness to the ways that the Taiga both

shape and are shaped by their surroundings over time. Omishto's frustration at the lawyer's ignorance recalls Lyons's assertion that sovereignty and self-determination include the inherent rights for Native peoples to create self-images in the present and carve out their futures ("Rhetorical Sovereignty" 449). As the courtroom scene encapsulates, such anthropological views, which reflect European American cultural and historical narratives on Native nations, influence legal discourse. Ama refuses to participate in this rhetoric and challenges the power of both the judiciary and anthropological discourse over self-definition. *Power* counters the erasure of Native presence in this linked legal, historical, and cultural discourse through Ama and Omishto, who instigate their community's survival.

The anthropologist's rhetoric epitomizes Robert Williams's assertion that modern federal law and discursive practice reflect the narrative tradition of tribal worldviews as incompatible with European American society (248). As Omishto observes, the courtroom audience "want[s] us to speak of things they don't believe in, to tell them stories that they can't understand. They believe what we say will give them something, a glimpse into another world, not of their concern, a world that is a crack in the container of their history" (Hogan 136). Yet how can Omishto make a hostile audience understand and respect the traditional story of the panther woman, Ama's sacrifice, and the need for cultural renewal? The courtroom audience wants to hear the stories that will solidify the Taiga's presence as the Other, which the audience will then use to mark the Taiga worldview as incompatible with their own culture. Hogan "exposes not only the inadequacy of Euro-American ideology to understand a Native ideology but also its destructive tendencies towards all ideologies that are different from it" (Bowen-Mercer 158). When Ama does not give the courtroom audience the stories that will support their misguided and stereotypical assumptions of indigenous peoples, the law attempts to classify her as insane.

Just as Hogan reimagines *Billie* to illuminate the contrasting conceptualizations of nationhood, as well as the way that law and rhetoric can function as colonizing methods, she also uses *Billie* to point out the irony in that the laws meant to protect people and the environment are created by individuals who do not know their own colonial legacy. On the drive to the courthouse, Omishto wonders whether the law will let her tell her story, including the environmental desolation she sees

wreaked by colonization: "Would they let me tell that sugarcane and cattle and white houses with red roofs had killed the land and the panther people even before the storm, they are the true violators. That the cattle and houses we are passing are the beginning of this crime and that their makers remain unjudged and untried" (Hogan 114). By comparing the Spanish colonial destruction through sugarcane cultivation and the "white houses with red roofs," Hogan establishes the contemporary white community's encroachment upon Native lands as a form of colonialism. This domination extends to the courts. While Ama faces the legal repercussions for slaying the panther, the same legal system does not hold the non-Indian community accountable for their own destruction of the environment. Hogan illuminates this contradiction through the representation of the consequences of the government's response to a drought. When government authorities open up Lake Okeechobee to assuage the drought, the water level rises so high that it drowns all the fawns. In response, the wardens kill all the starving deer and tag them to examine their stomach contents for science. Whereas Omishto's mother sees the slaughter of the deer as "the price you pay for progress," Omishto thinks that "it's the way to kill the world" (27). When Omishto takes the stand in the courtroom, the lawyers' questions prompt her to more deeply reflect upon the repercussions of these different views toward the natural environment. She also realizes the difficulty in making the courtroom audience, and by extension the white community, understand their own culpability in plundering the natural world that necessitates the need for renewal and Ama's killing of the panther.

To defend Ama during the hearing, Omishto wants to share what she has witnessed with the courtroom spectators, but she realizes that the white community does not recognize their destruction of the natural world. While Omishto understands that Ama broke the law by killing the panther, she reasons that Ama had to complete the act in order to renew the world when no one else would. Ama tries to renew the world, but Omishto sees with her own "eyes the boys driving through the place in their swamp buggies killing the land" (Hogan 125). The reference to boys recalls an earlier scene where Ama intervenes when young boys tree and try to kill a panther. In both instances, Ama, not the white community, steps in to defend the land and the animals. As Omishto observes about the boys in the swamp buggies, "The men wouldn't hold up so much as a finger to stop them, so maybe Ama took it all on her-

self to do so" (125). On the stand, Omishto realizes that despite Ama's interventions, the boys "are still out there chasing down the world" (126). Omishto's observations and realizations betray how one generation's attitude toward the land, that it is an exploitable resource or that activities like running swamp buggies do not ruin it, cycles on with the next generation; they do not realize the consequences of their actions and, more importantly, the consequences of their inactions to counter the effects of exploitation.

In the federal courtroom, Omishto learns that in addition to anthropological, historical, or popular narratives erasing her community's presence, federal laws similarly cover up the Taiga community's survival. In the marble halls of the courtroom, Omishto observes, "There's another kind of truth and it lies down over everything," and "part of what covers us is law" (Hogan 135-36). Indeed, the judicial rhetoric expresses and sustains colonial oppression: "The [courtroom] and what it contains divide one part of life from another. It has separated by scars, legal theft, even the stone of earth split and carried here to a building of justice, and then it covers everything broken all back over in words the way the kudzu plants from the old world cover this beautiful ground with foreign, choking vines" (118). Instead of the site where justice is administered, the courtroom is the place where "words can lie" (120). Furthermore, when Omishto looks at the sheets of paper in front of the lawyer, she determines that the tribe's misfortune is "old, and long, from before Ama's time or mine, clear back to when the first white men wandered lost in the swamps and grasses and forests" (127). Thus, Hogan situates the courtroom and European American law in a long line of colonial oppression. Kudzu is a particularly apt metaphor for colonialism. Kudzu, an invasive species of vine, overtakes the environment and covers the beautiful land that Taiga maintained prior to colonial conquest. By comparing legal rhetoric to kudzu as "foreign, choking vines," Hogan communicates that while environmental encroachment on tribal lands in the novel may appear as a more visible form of colonial occupation, the "written papers" and "words," meaning law and legislation, are more damaging to Native sovereignty and self-determination.

Whereas the courtroom space symbolizes the disempowerment of the Taiga through the colonial conquest of law, Kili Swamp is where the Taiga community can enact a non-Western form of sovereignty. If sovereignty for Western powers is based on the sum of individuals acting

out of self-interest, Native nations define themselves as a nation-people whose sense of sovereignty is based in *shared* traditions, culture, and their continuity, inextricably tied to land (Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty” 454–55, 457, emphasis added). In Kili Swamp, separated as it is from the white community, the Taiga maintain their sovereignty as a nation-people through communal activism and a tribal court independent of the US legal system. As D’Errico observes, “Sovereignty arises from within a people as their unique expression of themselves as a people. It is not produced by court decrees or government grants, but the actual ability of a people to sustain themselves in a place. This is self-determination” (“American Indians” 254). Omishto alludes to this form of self-determination when she expresses that for the tribe’s elders in Kili Swamp, “it doesn’t matter what was decided in the marble building in town. It doesn’t matter what’s written on paper. The old people are the ones who know the laws of this place, this world, laws stronger and older than America” (Hogan 160). Furthermore, the Taiga show a deep connection with the land, as their refusal to interact with it as a purely exploitable resource suggests. When Omishto arrives at the trial in Kili Swamp to recount what she witnessed, she feels at home where the “old people live among tradition and memory” and “hold themselves in a beautiful manner” by following “what the creator tells them to do in spite of the world of old rags.” In the place of their law, the Taiga live “outside an ugly world” on land free of “parts of things that have fallen out of the ruined world all around them” (154).

Oral storytelling traditions, communal activism, and relationship to land are guiding factors for the Taiga’s self-governance and serve as the basis for their verdict on Ama’s act. During the tribal court, the Taiga elders ask Omishto to tell her story, meaning what happened between Ama and the panther. While the US courtroom lawyers try to frame Ama’s identity within specific narratives that serve their own purposes, the tribal council waits for another type of story: “It is the story the elders need. . . . It’s why they have called me here, to tell this thing that can’t be told, to send words into a place words have not yet been, a ground not yet broken by them” (Hogan 160). The tribal court hearing is a storytelling session between the elders, Ama and Omishto, and the Taiga community members sitting around a fire on dry land. In front of the tribal council, Omishto understands that her “words will actually be important” to the Taiga elders, unlike for the white community (160).

Words for the Taiga create: "When spoken, words stand up straight as a stick . . . like thin gods, and if she stays by tradition, as if it, too, is a person, then something newly born and alive will remain in the air" (181). Whereas "words" and the "written papers" in the courtroom, representative of the federal legal rhetoric, undermine Native presence, storytelling serves as a means of survival and envisioning the longevity of Native nations. In the place of old law, Omishto "tell[s] the story in a different way"; it's "the same story," but she tells it "more true" (162). In Kili Swamp, Omishto has the space to explain how Ama saved the panther from the boys and the deep connection that Ama had with the panther, as if the panther guided Ama. But just as words can usher in a new stage for the Taiga's vitality and perpetuation, words also lead to the banishment of one of the Taiga's own.

Ama receives a more severe judgment from the Taiga elders and the Taiga legal system. They banish her, but in the Taiga "language the word for 'banishment' and the word for 'kill' is the same word; it's the same because in the traditional belief, banishment is equal to death. It is death to be split from your own people, your self, to go away from the place you so love" (Hogan 172). The tribal court finds Ama guilty of violating tribal law, since she did not invite the elders to participate in the ritual or give them the panther hide afterward. Additionally, the elders believe that Ama wanted power for herself. If Ama had deliberately acted in a self-serving manner, then she would have acted against the well-being of the Taiga community. Furthermore, if Ama had sought power, she would have usurped the authority of the tribal elders watching over the Taiga people and administering justice. Instead, Ama willingly attends the tribal court and accepts their verdict. The Taiga elders' view of Ama results from a deliberate omission meant to give them hope for survival. Ama had deliberately chosen a sickly panther, but she swears Omishto to silence regarding the cat's condition. If the tribal elders had seen it, they "would no longer believe or have hope." Instead, "[t]hey would lie down on the ground and never get up again in this world where the cars pass through on the cut roads and the roar of machines breaks the swamps among the dying fish" (167). Ama does not want her community to become hopeless. She wants them, like her, to believe in the possibility of cultural survival. For her self-sacrifice, Ama faces a "walking death," in which "a person walks and there is no place to go. They walk until they are bare bones then walk some more. No one ever comes

back from there” (176). The Taiga’s verdict and their justification for the decree embody how the Taiga maintain themselves as a nation-people through their traditions, culture, and continuity. Ama’s punishment also demonstrates the Taiga’s sense of nationhood based on their relationship with land. The Taiga elders assert their sovereignty and strip away Ama’s citizenship through a system not dependent on any legal documentation or the government’s system of blood quantum. Thus, the Taiga, not the federal government, ultimately have the power to decide who can belong to their community.

The two courtroom experiences allow Omishto to reassess her initial rejection of Taiga culture and worldview. She assesses that “our survival depends on who I am and who I will become” (Hogan 161). After the tribal court case, she dissociates herself from both her mother—a full-blooded Taiga who attempts to pass as white—and the dominant white culture. While her mother participates in a Christian church where they tell her that “it was [the Taiga’s] fate to be destroyed by those who were stronger and righter,” Omishto joins the female elders in Kili Swamp and participates in her community’s survival (187). In so doing, she challenges the machine of history as “a tidal wave that swallows worlds whole and leaves nothing behind” (170). Earlier, Omishto understands that the two female elders in the circle, Janie Soto and Annie Hilde, live to see the prosperity of their community. Annie believes that if she shares her knowledge with youth, “there will always be this shining in the world, an unbroken thread of light from a past where we were beautiful. It will curve around and into the present. And in another embrace, it will encircle the future and bring it all whole and together as one” (181). Before returning to Kili Swamp, it dawns on Omishto that Annie has prepared her for her leadership role by telling her stories about the Taiga’s perseverance and survival, such as after wars with the US Army. Indeed, the novel ends with an image of cultural renewal and the explicit links between past, present, and future that Annie envisions. The elders hand Omishto a fan made of white feathers, and together, alongside drummers, they dance. Omishto hears someone “sing the song that says the world will go on living” (235).

Omishto removes herself from the non-Indian world with its institutions such as schools that lead her to see Ama as foreign and exotic. As she confesses early in the novel, “It’s when I’ve come from school I’m most likely to find her homely and strange. I see her through the eyes of

other people and what they'd think of her. Through their eyes she looks wild and crazy" (Hogan 19). She retreats into the world of the Taiga in Kili Swamp, where she can continue to learn about her community's traditions, stories, and epistemologies and participate in the advancement of a rhetoric for self-representation from within the community. Given that the Taiga are a product of Hogan's imagination, enabling her to broaden the relevance of the case within the context of early twenty-first-century developments in sovereignty and indigenous intellectual tradition, Omishto's sense of belonging at the end of the novel enables readers to imagine the trajectory of Native youth promoting the health of their communities. As Lyons indicates, "Rhetorical sovereignty requires above all the presence of an Indian voice, speaking or writing in an ongoing context of colonization and setting at least some of the terms of debate" ("Rhetorical Sovereignty" 462). In addition to Ama, Annie, Janie, and the other elders are all sources that can provide Omishto cultural knowledge and practices to ensure the resiliency of the tribe.

Although the novel ends on this positive note, Omishto's choice of the Taiga world is imbued with risk, and readers must grapple with the potential repercussions that such mutual exclusion of the two worlds engenders. While Kili Swamp and this final scene serve as powerful reminders of the diversity and survival of Indian communities in contrast with the courtroom and the ongoing colonization and erasure through legal discourse, one cannot dismiss that ultimately neither legal system does justice to Ama nor understands her. The Taiga elders do not see that, like them, Ama wants the same thing for the tribe, its regeneration. Hogan indicates that what matters most is not just having power but how one wields that power. The Taiga elders' decision is not based on any legal documents or federal law, but that is not necessarily more desirable, because it leads to the exile of a community member who can provide valuable knowledge and experience to carry Taiga culture forward.

After the verdict, Annie visits Omishto and questions the Taiga's banishment: "I am thinking we threw her away," which is unfortunate, since "[Ama] was strong. She was important" (Hogan 226). Ama's importance stems from her physical and intellectual positionality between the two worlds and her insight into the community's need to adapt. Ama's home "sits on the very edge of our Taiga land, lines drawn by the government," and on the other side of the line is Fossil Road (6). Her physical position

affords her insight into the challenges that the Taiga face—challenges that are similar but also quite different from Spanish colonization. Ama betrays her wisdom early in the novel when she tells Omishto that “the old ways are not enough to get us through this time and she was called to something else. To living halfway between the modern world and the ancient one” (22–23). Ama critiques the maintenance of the Taiga world by the elders; though they administered justice in a beautiful world in the past, the vitality of the community depends on their ability to meet new challenges rather than dropping out of time and believing that the means of ensuring their survival in the past are still equally well equipped for the challenges they face in the present. Ama proves that she has not “dropped out of time”; rather, she attempts to model the possibilities of the in-between, merging past and present, by fitting the ancient story and the act of renewal to the contemporary. Her break from tradition by withholding the panther hide signals to the Taiga that the old ways are not enough to confront the panthers’ sickness and their extinction.

By exiling Ama, the Taiga elders further enclose the space around themselves, which may result in negative consequences like perpetuating the vanishing Indian narrative. Embedded within the Taiga elders’ tribal court decisions is control over the representation of themselves as Native peoples. This control shapes policy and action. But what if the elders’ judgments promote an image of stagnation? Rhetorical sovereignty promotes the futurity of Native peoples. Ama envisions her community adapting and bridging worlds, past and present. In exiling her for not following tradition, the elders promote the old ways and beliefs as the only accepted and viable options for the Taiga to endure. Through these tensions, Hogan highlights the difficult task of enacting rhetorical sovereignty and countering the vanishing Indian or noble savage narratives. The Taiga’s isolation from the non-Indian community may result in lack of dialogue with the white community. This silence in turn may perpetuate their exoticization in various genres and modes of communication by the dominant culture. However, Ama leaves someone behind: Omishto. Omishto, whose name means one who watches, witnesses the sickness and decline of panthers, meditates over the ethics and consequences of both legal systems, and learns from Ama the necessity of adapting traditions. Additionally, Annie, who ventures away from the Taiga to express her frustration over the loss of Ama, plants a seed in

Omishto. Annie shows Omishto that the tribe did not administer justice to Ama. Omishto retreats to the world of the Taiga and faces a difficult journey: she must learn from the Taiga in order to speak back to the non-Indian community, and she must show the Taiga elders a path that secures the perpetuation of the tribe as a nation-people in the contemporary world. Informed by Ama's lessons and Annie's message, Omishto takes her place within the tribe and brings a more nuanced understanding of power.

The issues that Hogan raises in *Power* continue into the present. The Tribal Law and Order Act (2010), which seeks to enhance government-to-government collaboration ("Tribal Law"), and President Obama's pledge in 2010 to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (US Department of State 1), which indicates that "Indigenous groups have the right to self-determination" and "the right to autonomy or self-government" (United Nations 4), raise once again questions of what defines sovereignty and who has the power to define it. Reclamation of sovereignty requires "a recognition of that group's power—a recognition made by both self and other. It is not something 'new' or, worse, something 'given' by dominant groups," and as Lyons suggests, "For the sake of the people, we might all do well to contemplate what that might mean" ("Rhetorical Sovereignty" 458). *Power* tasks literary critics to study and delineate to policymakers rhetorical sovereignty as envisioned in American Indian literatures. Still, given her critique of the tribe's wielding of power, Hogan calls attention to the necessity of additional discussions on what this rhetorical sovereignty should entail.

Classroom instruction and scholarly work, especially literary theory and criticism, help facilitate achieving sovereignty in legislation on Native nations' terms. Lyons, discussing the rearguing of federal policy decisions on Native sovereignty as part of the Indian Law Institute conference sponsored by the Tribal Law and Government Center at the University of Kansas Law School, asserts that "[c]ritical pedagogues, contact-zone theorists, and post/anti-colonial rhetoricians" can actively learn from "these powerful Indian countersentences to colonialism" (463). At this conference, Indian and non-Indian lawyers and judges conduct the retrials under the auspices of the "American Indian Nations Supreme Court," a panel of tribal judges from throughout Indian Country (Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty" 463; Porter 71–72). Briefs and opin-

ions of these retrials are published alongside the historical opinions and briefs on the original cases. Critics and instructors can use these pairings to frame conversations on the negotiation of indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. In the opinion for the rearguing of *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* at the 1998 conference, the American Indian Nations Supreme Court ruled: “We hold that the Indian Nations *within* (and not ‘of’) the United States are nations and states” (Yazzie 171, emphasis original). The opinion on this reargued case, with its emphasis “*within* (and not ‘of’),” enables critic, instructor, and student alike to return to and interrogate the classification of American Indian nations as “domestic dependent nations” of the United States. Likewise, by teaching a novel like *Power*, in which Native and non-Native individuals interact within court spaces and otherwise along legal and political lines, and centering conversations on indigenous sovereignty, scholars, critics, instructors, and students can create spaces and sites to then articulate best practices for perpetuating rhetorical sovereignty.

Additionally, novels like *Power* that reimagine legal cases prompt literary critics, readers, and activists to listen to and include Native epistemologies, voices, and concerns in classrooms and critical work. In so doing, individuals practice “communitism.” Jace Weaver coined the phrase from “activism” and “community” and argues that “[t]hrough communitism, by proclaiming and living our commitment to Native community and values, we would set our scholarly work and our literatures in the stream of history to which they belong” (xii). This commitment involves reading historical and political contexts in an act of decolonization, for “to promote communitist values means to participate in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them” (xiii). *Power* and other Native American novels reveal and critique the engine of historical and cultural narratives that produce federal Indian policy undercutting Native peoples’ self-determination. By studying these novels, critics participate in the production of a literary criticism that helps Native communities in their pursuit to maintain sovereignty and thrive.

My reading of *Power*, I hope, participates in these ongoing discussions about rhetorical sovereignty, including how Native and non-Native scholars, literary critics, activists, writers, instructors, and students craft and employ this intellectual praxis of rhetorical sovereignty. As King notes about pedagogical practice informed by rhetorical sovereignty

and, I would add, critical interpretive practice, “rhetorical sovereignty stipulates that Native texts be understood as part of the ongoing stories from which they come” (“Rhetorical Sovereignty and Rhetorical Alliance” 219). To explicate some ways writers practice and promote rhetorical sovereignty and grapple with what a literary analysis informed by the principle of rhetorical sovereignty can look like and how it can partake in communitism, I return to Hogan’s strategic rhetorical move: shifting the tribe at the center of the trial from Seminoles to the fictional Taiga. After all, if one application of rhetorical or intellectual sovereignty entails a tribally or nation specific reading of a text, then the fictional Taiga pose particular challenges. I see these tensions not as burdens, but as an opportunity to harness examples like these and continue to discuss and develop the concept of rhetorical sovereignty into methodologies for interpreting American Indian literatures.

One tenet of this methodology is to understand how American Indian authors and rhetors use writing to address multiple audiences for a variety of purposes in specific locations and during particular social, cultural, and political circumstances (220, 221). By drawing out how the discourse of federal Indian policy informs the *Billie* case and the rendering of that case in *Power*, peeling back the layers of the historical portrayal of the case in media and its reception in public, and situating Hogan’s reimagining of the case within a history of Native self-determination, I hope to have illuminated lived circumstances that inform *Power*. With this context, I delineated how Hogan uses writing to respond to these discourses and perhaps engenders audience members’ awareness of the “ever-present but rarely examined representations of American Indians and indigenous peoples” and thus understanding of “how indigenous rhetorics function in relationship to these representations and their consequences” (King, “Sovereignty” 17). One can recognize that “every place has its peoples” and that, in addition to centering a Native writer’s audience awareness, purposes, and the space from which she writes, the land on which the writer imagines possibilities for her community also bears witness to “a history and a community of struggle” (Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty” 465). While my interpretation of *Power* does not focus on American Indian communities’ histories and assertions of self-determination within Florida, I emphasize how American Indian activism and social and political events that unfolded within the larger landmass of the U.S. settler state informed Hogan’s novel.

King offers the following suggestions for employing rhetorical sovereignty and alliance in the classroom: situating Native rhetorical traditions within the larger “communicative course of American history,” discussing genre, including the ways in which Native peoples use European American genres for their communities’ communicative needs, how Native peoples develop and use digital texts, and with literary analysis, “investigat[ing] the how and why of Native representations in literature by or about Native peoples” (“Rhetorical Sovereignty and Rhetorical Alliance” 221). King also outlines a number of student learning outcomes that instructors can use to craft assignments that foster rhetorical sovereignty. Critics can continue to develop methodologies for the study of American Indian literatures with these goals in mind. One goal is to engage with historical representations of indigenous peoples and explicate how this history informs contemporary preconceptions of “Indians” (“Sovereignty” 29). Another goal is to foster critical inquiry and argumentative skills by asking questions about the rhetorical situation: Who created the piece? For what purpose? Who makes up the intended or evoked audience(s)? What political, social, and cultural contexts and discourses inform the construction of the text? (30). The third component is to “address the ways indigenous communities have weighed in, critiqued, altered, or reconfigured images and stereotypes” (31). Recognition of Native communities’ presence and agency remains central to a praxis based in rhetorical sovereignty. On this note of presence, I would like to end this article by turning to Lyons’s notion of the x-mark.

An x-mark functioned historically as a treaty signature, “a contaminated and coerced sign of consent made under conditions that are not of one’s making” (Lyons, *X-Marks* 1–2). An x-mark is a sign of contamination, as it denotes settlers’ introduction of treaties and alphabetic writings to Native communities’ own systems of organization, decision making, and relationship between peoples, parties, and lands (1–2). Coercion refers to the fact that “treaties were made under conditions that were generally unfavorable to Indians” (1). Finally, an x-mark is a sign of consent, as “little choice isn’t quite the same thing as no choice,” and thus an x-mark signifies Indian agency (1). Still, in the face of colonization, an x-mark could result in something good. Lyons uses x-marks “to symbolize Native assent to things (concepts, policies, technologies, ideas) that, while not necessarily traditional in origin, can sometimes

turn out all right and occasionally even good" (3). Perhaps rhetorical sovereignty as a principle that informs pedagogical practice and literary criticism can function as an x-mark.

Hogan, a Chickasaw author, through the fictionalized Taiga tribe in *Power* writes against the grain of ethnographic representations of American Indians. Confronted with discourses in which "Natives have been discussed exclusively in the past tense" and "modernity has been discussed as if it were strictly a Western imposition," rhetorical sovereignty requires seeing Native peoples' "continued presence in history" and "the reality of Indian time on the move" (Lyons, *X-Marks* 13). It means understanding the ways in which "Native intellectuals resisted and appropriated dominant discourses of their times" and that while "the Indian still speaks as an Indian," which has negative consequences on Native peoples' futurity in this intertwined system of political and cultural discourses linked to "sundry other historical structures," one must also see how an x-mark can escape "from the prison house of dominant discourse" (30). Hogan, to borrow Lyons's words, highlights the "danger of this comfort" in reading indigenous peoples as symbols of the past: a romanticization that misreads and excludes actually existing Indian nations' insight from policy, to research, to classroom pedagogies ("Actually Existing" 310). An x-mark, then, is also literary criticism that engages "with the irreducible *modernity* and *diversity* that inheres in every Native community and has for some time" (297, emphasis original). To acknowledge Native peoples' diversity does not necessitate dismissing traditionalism, nor does an emphasis on modernization necessitate the dismissal of pastoralism or other traditional modes of production (310). Just as Omishto witnesses how Ama has not "dropped out of time," so too can readers and critics address sovereignty, rhetorical sovereignty, and representations of indigenous peoples as part of the process of bearing witness to indigenous survivance and continuing serious dialogues between tribal nations as they define themselves in the world today and non-Native communities.

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US ethnic and indigenous literatures, trauma and memory studies, and postcolonial, diaspora, and migration studies.

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NOTE

1. See Eric Gary Anderson, Carrie Bowen-Mercer, Lawrence Buell, Greta Gaard, Susan McHugh, and Catherine Rainwater.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Aileen Moreton-Robinson. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Indigenous Americas Series. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2015. ISBN 978-0-8166-9216-3. 239 pp.

Miriam Brown Spiers, *University of California Merced*

In *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Aileen Moreton-Robinson persuasively demonstrates the ways that racism has been—and continues to be—enshrined in the laws of settler colonial states such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada. Arguing that there is a fundamental disconnect between the rhetoric of Indigenous scholarship and that of the disciplines with which Indigenous studies intersects, Moreton-Robinson points to the importance of analyzing the influence of race, not just culture, in discussions of Indigeneity in general and of sovereignty in particular. While the reclamation of Indigenous knowledge and a focus on scholarship grounded in Indigenous epistemologies is key to Indigenous studies, Moreton-Robinson argues that scholars must also “consider how we as Indigenous peoples have been sociohistorically constructed through first world Western knowledge systems that are ontologically and epistemologically grounded in differentiation” (xvii). On the basis of this claim, *The White Possessive* proposes that Indigenous studies must expand to address not only Native perspectives and rhetorics but also those of the white nation-state, which are so often grounded in a racialized understanding of possession that has been embodied in legal and political texts.

The greatest strength of *The White Possessive* is contained in its central argument, which is remarkable both for its simplicity and its complexity. At first glance, the idea that Indigenous studies should acknowl-

edge race and racism seems logical but not necessarily innovative. As the argument unfolds, however, it reveals a relationship between race and ownership that is purposeful rather than circumstantial, and the logic of that relationship enables Moreton-Robinson to theorize concepts that seem fundamental to Indigenous studies—but that scholars may previously have struggled to articulate for a nonspecialist audience. In one of the most compelling facets of that argument, Moreton-Robinson argues that Native title, as it is currently conceived of in Australian law and policy, “is not Indigenous sovereignty because it is nothing more than a bundle of rights to hunt, gather, and negotiate as determined by Australian law” (94). In other words, so long as Indigenous rights are bestowed by a settler colonial government, they cannot reflect actual sovereignty. Thus, although Australia’s current government claims to actively refute racist policies and embrace multiculturalism, the very existence of that government, and especially its assumption that it can arbitrate the rights of Indigenous peoples, is predicated upon the racist actions of earlier governments. Those actions are in turn predicated upon a sense of ownership bestowed only on those who are identified as white. Claims of possession—from Capt. James Cook’s decision to take Australia without first negotiating with its Indigenous inhabitants to the present—are grounded in a rhetoric that rewards whiteness with land, virtue, and recognition of humanity while simultaneously denying Indigenous peoples the right to ownership: of their bodies, their lands, and their lives.

The White Possessive is divided into three sections: “Owning Property,” “Becoming Propertyless,” and “Being Property.” Each of these sections contains four chapters, which vary in scope from a close reading of a particular legal decision (as in “The High Court and the *Yorta Yorta* Decision”) to the proposal of a new theoretical framework (as in “Toward a New Research Agenda: Foucault, Whiteness, and Sovereignty”). In each section, Moreton-Robinson draws upon numerous theorists and scholars from a variety of disciplines to construct an ambitious overarching argument about the nature of power and possession. In addition to citing critics in Indigenous studies, she also relies on Michel Foucault’s discussion of sovereignty, Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, and a wide range of scholars working in critical race studies, especially those whose work is centered in African American studies. The text’s ability to thoughtfully engage with so many conversations can be simultaneously impressive and daunting. It is exhilarating

to follow *The White Possessive* as it forges connections across seemingly disparate fields; in some chapters, however, the influx of new information can make it difficult to distinguish the text's own argument. "Writing Off Treaties: Possession in the U.S. Critical Whiteness Literature," for instance, compactly summarizes many other scholars' arguments while exposing gaps in the literature, but, bookended as it is by chapters that discuss the history of white masculinity on Australia's beaches and two Australian court cases, readers may initially struggle to understand how the various essays fit together.

This struggle is alleviated in later chapters, which reward readers with more concrete examples and clearer connections. In the second and third sections, in particular, the focus on multiple secondary sources gives way to chapters that more frequently examine particular texts. Essays such as "Leesa's Story" and "The Legacy of Cook's Choice" engage more deeply with a single narrative, with subjects ranging from affidavits gathered during a 2005 case of racial discrimination in Queensland to the journal entries written by Captain Cook during his first encounter with Aboriginal peoples in 1770. The narrower focus of such chapters allows *The White Possessive* to provide greater context and, therefore, a steadier vantage point for readers who are not already intimately familiar with the texts under discussion.

Moreton-Robinson acknowledges in her introduction that "each chapter has been written independently of the other, but together they form a thematic body of work" (xxi). As she applies her theory to numerous case studies, spanning centuries and continents in the process, that theme emerges more clearly. The presence of concepts that may disorient the reader in early chapters becomes a strength as the text's theoretical position is examined from multiple angles through various case studies. Even more than the overwhelming support offered by Moreton-Robinson's use of diverse critical and theoretical sources, it is her ability to demonstrate the theoretical connections between diverse texts that proves the efficacy of her argument. Applying the rhetoric of race, especially as it informs the white nation-state's understanding of possession and sovereignty, to texts as distinct as the performative presence of white male bodies on Australian beaches, the speeches of Australian prime minister John Howard, and a rhetorical analysis of Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada's response to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples allows Moreton-Robinson to

emphasize the great importance of engaging with discourses of racialized ownership within Indigenous studies.

The fact that each chapter was written individually has the potential to attract a wider audience for *The White Possessive*, including those with a specific interest in Aboriginal Australian, American Indian, or First Nations studies individually, as well as those searching for a broader sense of Indigenous studies as a whole. Because Moreton-Robinson engages with Indigenous law, history, and contemporary politics across settler colonial nation-states, the book will also appeal to an interdisciplinary readership. Although the complexity of both language and argument might make the book unsuitable for use in introductory courses, the fact that each essay stands alone will allow instructors to use various excerpts in upper-division and graduate courses. There is, however, one drawback to the independent nature of each chapter: when the book is read cover to cover, audiences will encounter a surprising amount of repetition, sometimes of entire paragraphs or theoretical summaries. For instance, Moreton-Robinson draws on Foucault in chapter 9, "Toward a New Research Agenda," and again in chapter 11, "Imagining the Good Indigenous Citizen." Her use of Foucault's theory of the relationship between race and the nation-state is compelling in both instances, but because these chapters originated as separate texts, she repeats her discussion of Foucault, sometimes even drawing upon the same quotations in the process.

Although the text's theoretical argument does become more concrete as readers work their way through the book, it may be more productive to conceptualize *The White Possessive* as an exploration of variations on a theme, which ultimately allows each reader to focus on the topics that she or he finds most compelling. Having begun by pointing out the ways that Indigenous studies fails to engage with the discussions about Indigenous peoples that take place in other fields, Moreton-Robinson has ultimately written a text that responds to many of those discussions. In this case, the ability of each chapter to stand alone is a great benefit to the text, mobilizing individual essays and allowing them to move outside of Indigenous studies in order to intervene in other disciplinary conversations. By drawing on such disparate critical and theoretical works, Moreton-Robinson takes a step toward engaging other critics in their own fields rather than waiting for them to learn the discourse of Indigenous studies. Ultimately, by meeting other scholars on their own

ground, *The White Possessive* is able to advance discussions of the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and systemic racism simultaneously in multiple fields.

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Qwo-Li Driskill. *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2016. ISBN 78-0-8165-3048-9. 210 pp.

Lisa Tatonetti, *Kansas State University*

Prominent Cherokee poet and critic Qwo-Li Driskill is an important voice in queer Indigenous studies. To name just a selection of hir writing, Driskill's work includes the foundational 2004 essay "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic" and the coedited 2011 companion texts *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* (U of Arizona P) and *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literature* (U of Arizona P), along with three books of poetry: *Walking with Ghosts: Poems* (Salt P, 2005), *Book of Memory: Honor Poems* (Dragonfly Rising P, 2002), and *Burning Upward Flight* (Dragonfly Rising P, 2002). Driskill's first monograph, *Asegi Stories*, furthers hir powerful intervention into queer Indigenous and Two-Spirit studies.

The term *asegi* (*asegi udanto/udant[i/a] / udantedi*, "strange heart" / "spirited"), one of multiple Cherokee terms for Two-Spirit people, functions as the methodological framework for *Asegi Stories* (6). Rejecting the possibility of reclaiming any sort of untainted knowledge of Cherokee past(s), Driskill instead undertakes a researched return to and reimagining of pivotal moments in Cherokee history, looking for *asegi* possibilities. Comprised of an introduction, epilogue, and five chapters, *Asegi Stories* thus takes part in a process of "re-storying," which Driskill defines as "a retelling and reimagining of stories that restores and continues cultural memories" (3). To do so, the text weaves interviews, archival documents, literature, and personal experience into what

Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen/Chumash writer Deborah Miranda might term a decolonial mosaic.

In the introduction, which is divided into six “splints,” Driskill recounts the memory of his first encounter with queer Indigenous literature (Chrystos’s poetry), reviews the current state of the field, and introduces the book’s methodology by deploying an extended metaphor of basket weaving. Thus Driskill’s first chapter, which is an expanded version of his piece from the landmark *GLQ* special issue *Sexuality, Nationality, Indigeneity*, considers the “doubleweave” of queer and Two-Spirit studies. To construct this doubleweave, chapter 1 maps both the points of connection between the two fields and the moments at which queer of color critiques elide Indigenous histories even as they work against heteropatriarchal state narratives. Driskill’s point is not to dismiss the usefulness of these critical perspectives but instead to argue for the need to center Indigenous knowledges in any research that claims to challenge settler politics.

Driskill’s second chapter gathers together narratives of contact and conquest from settler accounts of expeditions into the Southeast, ancestral lands of the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Seminoles, to re-story representations of Indigenous genders and sexualities. The chapter maps the successive waves of colonial incursions, beginning with Hernando de Soto’s 1540 expedition, the first recorded encounter with the Cherokees. The story of de Soto’s meeting and subsequent kidnapping of the Lady of Cofitachequi, a leader of an influential Indigenous nation (likely Catawban), and the *asegi* narrative of her subsequent escape provide a compelling anchor for the chapter. Driskill reads across multiple such colonial accounts of contact with Indigenous peoples who in some way exceed or deny the heteropatriarchal demands of colonizers to show how the geospatial mapping of territory hinges on sexual and gendered violence. After considering seven colonial routes—de Soto’s, Tristán de Luna y Arellano’s (1559), Juan Pardo’s (1567), John Lawson’s (1709), Henry Timberlake’s (1760s), William Bartram’s (late 1700s), and James Adair’s (1775)—Driskill ends the chapter with “*Asegi* Memories,” an eighth route that steps away from this settler narrative of conquest. In this moving conclusion, which reminds readers that Driskill is as much a poet as a critic, Driskill notes: “We were never lost. While heteropatriarchal colonization attempts to claim land and bodies, Asegi

bodies remain unruly. We trick colonial powers. We escape. We survive. We re-create and re-member who we are. We come home” (99).

In chapter 3, Driskill follows the work of scholars like Tiya Miles to interrogate the gendered parameters of black-Indian relations. Within these, Driskill considers both the documented shift in gender expectations in the Cherokee Nation as expressed by the creation of written laws about property disbursement, as well as the references to free and enslaved blacks in these newly written Cherokee laws. Driskill notably rejects the romanticized narrative in which slavery arose solely through white interaction, instead pointing to the fact that forms of slavery, such as the enslavement of enemies after battles between Indigenous nations, existed prior to the removal era. However, the chapter contends that the understanding and deployment of those practices shifted toward a codified violence through settler intervention. Through a consideration of the laws passed in the early 1800s as Cherokee political leaders aligned with dominant European norms in a strategy intended to thwart removal, Driskill shows how “[n]ormative sexual relationships became codified in Cherokee law through the violent racism of enslavement” (132).

The fourth and fifth chapters of *Asegi Stories* take up the stories of queer/Two-Spirit Cherokee peoples from two different vantage points: the historical record and the present day. In chapter 4, Driskill analyzes the papers of John Howard Payne, an actor and playwright who stayed with Principal Chief John Ross in 1836 as he (Payne) edited the work of missionary Daniel S. Butrick. Offering a careful reading of the relay between Butrick’s collected sources and Payne’s rewritings, Driskill considers the accounts of a ceremony called “perpetual friendship” (also termed “Cementation” and “Conciliation Festival”) as a compelling example of “an *Asegi* rupture,” a story hidden like cedar hidden within the doubleweave of a basket (141). Driskill posits that the ceremony, which could take place between two men, two women, or a man and woman from the same tribe who had fallen in love, may well have been a way to reconcile couples who, though they love each other, could not—because of biology or clan law—bear children together. Balancing this rhetorical analysis of the archive, chapter 5 draws from Driskill’s interviews with four queer Cherokee people to consider their descriptions of their relationship with the term “Two-Spirit,” as well as their sense of the place of queer/Two-Spirit Cherokee people within the nation and their beliefs about Two-Spirit futures.

Overall, Driskill's *Asegi Stories* brings a rich new source into the lively conversation of contemporary queer Indigenous studies. Based in part on research and in part on creative reworkings of culture, Driskill's monograph presents both a valuable critical source for Two-Spirit histories and theories and a model for a creative praxis that productively envisions the *asegi* space of the future.

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Max Early. *Ears of Corn: Listen*. Taos, NM: 3:A Taos Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-9847925-5-9. 98 pp.

Bryce Stevenson

In my first poetry workshop, the professor advised me to “write about what you know and about who you are.” At first, it confused me. I thought I had been writing about what I knew. The more I dwelled on his comment, the more it irritated me. So I wrote a list of everything I was and knew, and by the time I got through all of the foods and music and animals I liked, I started to write real facts about having alcoholic parents, diabetic aunties, cancerous uncles, and foster parents who shaped the person I’ve become in both good and bad ways. In short, the final items on the list told me I am a Rez kid, an Ojibwe guy, an Anishinaabeinini. From then on, I started writing about what it means to be a Rez kid. At the same time, I started attending Anishinaabemowin language courses and American Indian literature courses, and I began asking as many questions as I could, because I realized that there was an overwhelming gap between what I knew about being Native and what the idea and experience truly meant. I learned to tap into my ancestry in a way that I had never even considered. My writing became more complex, was filled with deeper understanding, and was more beautiful to me.

This is why I find so much eloquent tranquility and inexpressible passion in Max Early's *Ears of Corn: Listen*. I spent time building up to the realization that being indigenous is something *beautiful*, a thing *amaz-*

ing, an existence *worthy* of sharing—and there Early is and has been, a neighbor a thousand miles to the south of me, spending his days knowing and loving and experiencing the wonderments of his culture, his family, his Nativeness. It is fortunate for me and all votaries of written spirit that Early has been so kind as to extract so many tiny seeds and bulbs from the grounds of the Laguna Pueblo, sketch such small pockets into the deep flesh of our minds, and leave those tiny gifts to sprout and blossom with incredible elegance and beautiful, bright, interminable illustrations into the hungry darkness of our memories.

Ears of Corn: Listen is a book of poetry. Max Early is a poet. He is also a potter, and his book is as much a well-crafted work of visual allure as it is an ultimate expression of who he is and what he knows. Early didn't simply write a book to be read, stacked on a shelf, and forgotten. He created tiny stories that mean something to him, that spark a sense of familiarity with me, that stand on the page as proud and anxious to please as the clay dug from the skin of the earth and decorated with the blood of nature. I stepped into the book expecting highly organized, neatly enjambed stanzas, strategic resistance to end-rhyme, even a harsh strictness in meter and line count. What else can readers expect when a physical artist decides to also become a lyrical illustrator? But Early exceeds expectations as he explores the hallowed affection so many of our tribes have regarding the connection between our existence and the rotation of spring, summer, fall, and winter. Early begins, of course, by bearing witness to the vast Laguna Pueblo's spring: "Spring skies parched, clear and white blue,/ Rainmaker smokes with mountain spirits,/ Puffing cumulus clouds over *Tsee-binna*,/ Deserts are rainless without a dance."

Ah, yes. I've failed to mention the best part. *Ears of Corn: Listen* is bilingual. It has been my experience that many Native poets who write in their language write either entirely in their Native language or write in the language of colonization. Like Early, my practice at this point has been to weave the two together. Perhaps it's my inadequate fluency, but I find something powerful in strangling the English language with the beautiful vines of indigenous language. As language is simply an organized understanding of sounds and characters and is forever in a state of evolution and change, it is always my enterprise to impregnate what is my first language with as much of what should have been my first language as I can. Early does this, and does it perfectly.

While it is my savage pleasure to avoid translation for the sake of making my readers go through the trouble of researching unknown words, common sense dictates that not all languages have the benefit of online dictionaries and that not all poets want to discourage their readers from having to work outside of the pages they are holding. Thus, Max Early finds ways to either weave the English translation into the art itself or place the translation along the side of the page, near enough to promote understanding and gift knowledge, yet far enough away not to desecrate his creation.

Flowing through the seasons, the reader is gifted with more striking imagery, more experience with Keresan words, and more understanding of the importance of pottery to Early's people. The preface, written by Early himself, gives a quick history regarding pottery and Pueblos. The poems, however, impart a deep understanding of the love between clay and community. Creating poetic form to mirror his ancient art seems to be an ambitious attempt, and in all honesty, it seemed borderline gimmicky the first time I riffled the pages. However, this isn't just a collection of scribbled lyrics. It's a story, an experience, an expression of what Early is, what he knows. It's the flagship example of what I hope to achieve before my time to depart this world arrives. Early uses poetic form as part of his story, his journey, and his experience to mirror and express his love for pottery.

Poetry is an expression, an extension, of the human spirit. Fortunately for me, my spirit is kindred with Max Early. While I may only be recently on my journey of self-awareness, of cultural connection, and Early is obviously deeply connected to the land, people, and art of his ancestry, we are both still journeying through the expression of poetry as a way to discover what is intended by the spirits who control existence and what beauty is left to witness and express through communication with each other.

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