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CONTENTS

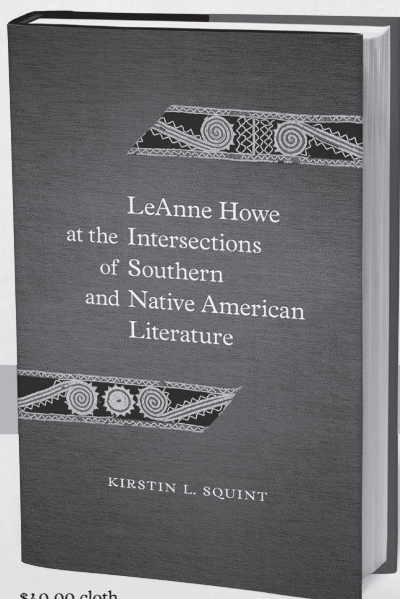
vii From the Editors

ARTICLES

- 1 Females, the Strong Ones: Listening to the Lived Experiences of American Indian Women
ANDREA RILEY MUKAVETZ
- 24 Gothic Silence: S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema*, the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and the Indigenous Unspeakable
AMY GORE
- 50 Maria Tallchief, (Native) *America's Prima Ballerina*: Autobiographies of a Postindian Princess
SHANNON TOLL
- 71 Bending, Turning, and Growing: Cree Language, Laws, and Ceremony in Louise B. Halfe / Sky Dancer's *The Crooked Good*
ANGELA VAN ESSEN
- 94 "The Unkillable Mother": Sovereignty and Survivance in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*
MARY PANICCIA CARDEN

BOOK REVIEWS

- 117 Layli Long Soldier. *WHEREAS*
CRYSTAL ALBERTS
- 121 Tadeusz Lewandowski. *Red Bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Ša*
CARI CARPENTER
- 124 Mini Aodla Freeman. *Life among the Qallunaat*
LAURA M. FURLAN



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FROM THE EDITORS

SAIL: Fortieth Anniversary Issue

It's been a wildly busy first year for us since Siobhan came on as *SAIL* general editor in 2016—first with Michelle Raheja, now with June Scudeler—and started building a dynamic group of new (and old) associate editors and editorial assistants. So the journal's fortieth anniversary in 2017 very nearly caught us unawares. But here we are, four decades into publication of the flagship journal for Native American and Indigenous literary studies. Like other editors before us, we feel the need to take some stock of how things have developed and where we hope our ever-diverse and ever-burgeoning field might go.

Since 2003 ASAIL, our host association, whose newsletter became *SAIL* in 1997, has met annually under the generous hospitality of the Native American Literature Symposium (if you haven't caught up with Clan Mother LeAnne Howe's history of that symposium, it's a must-read). In 2013 we also welcomed the arrival of an exciting new sister organization, the Indigenous Literary Studies Association (ILSA). It was founded by the late Jo-Ann Episkew (Métis) and Renate Eigenbrod along with Kristina Bidwell (NunatuKavut [Labrador]), Keavy Martin, Sam McKegney, Rick Monture (Mohawk), Deanna Reder (Cree-Métis), and Armand Ruffo (Anishinaabe), as well as one of our predecessors, former *SAIL* editor Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee). ILSA provides a home for scholarship on Indigenous literatures produced within the territories claimed by the Canadian state. Some of the most cutting-edge work in Indigenous literary studies today is being produced by ILSA and its members, and we are eager to create more sustained dialogues and partnerships between our two groups.

Our focus in this issue—on women writers on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel—thus reflects our editorial makeup and aspirations, as well as developments in our larger field. Indigenous women have been newly visible, and newly empowered, in recent battles against the imperial, gendered, and environmental violence of both the Canadian and

American settler states. They have demanded greater visibility for the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women; they have fought for and won changes to the Violence Against Women Act. They have been at the heart of the Idle No More movement, as well as the Dakota Pipeline protests. And Indigenous women have been *writing*, with energy like never before.

Longtime readers of this journal may recall that, in its first decades, it was rather heavily bibliographic, as scholars including Karl Kroeber and LaVonne Ruoff labored to identify and build the canon. Paula Gunn Allen was one of our first editors, and women writers have been a subject of interest since the very beginning: Leslie Marmon Silko, Mourning Dove, and Virginia Beavert (Yakima) were all mentioned in *SAIL*'s first year. Today, it's almost impossible to keep up with all the great writing being published by Indigenous women. In Canada they have produced groundbreaking collections, like the 1993 volumes *Writing as Witness*, edited by Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk), and *The Colour of Resistance*, edited by Connie Fife (Cree). Both of these Two-Spirited editors and authors died within the last couple of years without the full recognition we feel they deserve; but things may be changing for the better. Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (Anishinaabe), for example, founder of Kegedonce Press, is well-known for publishing Indigenous erotica and other path-clearing work, including the brave and beautiful *Passages*, by self-described Two-Spirited trans poet Gwen Benaway (Anishinaabe/Métis). We have also watched with pleasure as First Nations women have begun racking up awards and accolades for their work, including Cherie Dimaline's thought-provoking and beautifully written young adult novel, *The Marrow Thieves*; Carleigh Baker's (Métis) wonderfully strange short story collection *Bad Endings*; and Eden Robinson's (Haisla/Heiltsuk) *Trickster Shift*, the first of a trilogy.

In the territories claimed by the United States, Native women have been just as prolific and successful. Poets like Natalie Diaz (Mojave) and Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota) are getting recognition far beyond Indigenous and ethnic studies. Native American writers are also actively publishing in an ever-wider array of genres. Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel (Mohegan) and others are producing speculative fiction; Sara Sue Hoklotubbe (Cherokee) and now Marcie Rendon (White Earth Anishinaabe) have published murder mysteries; Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe) has collected numerous Indigenous women sci-fi writers in her land-

mark anthology *Walking the Clouds* (2012). Long-esteemed authors like Linda LeGarde Grover and Joy Harjo continue to work; the Erdrich sisters, for their part, seem unstoppable.

McKegney has referred to “ovular” rather than “seminal” scholarship as a way of highlighting the importance of Indigenous women’s contributions to First Nations criticism in Canada, especially to their role in delineating tribal nationalist approaches (412). For example, in the early 1990s Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) was already writing that in order to understand First Nations literature, scholars must attend to “the culture from which it arises” and that “First Nations literature will be defined by First Nations writers, readers, academics and perhaps only by writers and critics from within those varieties of First Nations contemporary and past practice of culture and the knowledge of it” (7). In 1993 Kimberly Blaeser (Anishinaabe) similarly stressed the need for “a way to approach Native literature from an indigenous cultural context, a way to frame and enact a tribal-centered criticism,” emphasizing that such an approach should “arise out of the literature itself (this is opposed to criticism applied from an already established critical language or attempts to make the literature fit already established genres and categories of meaning)” (53–54).

We take these exhortations seriously, and so do the authors represented in the issue at hand, all of them relatively new voices in our field. Hailing from the discipline known as Native rhetorics, Andrea Riley Mukavetz (Chippewa) provides a strong lead essay, considering Indigenous women’s story as theory—as methodology. Thoroughly informed by Anishinaabeg land and epistemology, Riley Mukavetz’s approach is all the more intriguing for its grounding in urban space—in Indian cultural centers in and around Lansing, Michigan, where multigenerational Odawa women helped her construct a methodology based on accountability and relationality. “What I hope comes from [their] stories,” she says, “is an understanding of the constellated nature of how our Indigenous knowledges and community members impact our research and writing and how we can collaborate with community members to decolonize academic systems of beliefs” (3).

We present the next four essays historically. Amy Gore revisits S. Alice Callahan’s *Wynema* (1891), now one of the best-known early novels by an Indigenous woman, by way of Gothic conventions, using the

trope of silence or the “unspeakable” to tease out this text’s hidden resistance to colonial violence. By excavating seemingly repressed historical traumas, most notably the Battle of the Little Bighorn (1876) and the Muscogee Green Peach War (1879–81), Gore posits that “the Indigenous unspeakable gestures toward the horror experienced through this era and thus preserves a certain kind of cultural memory through these pronounced silences” (42).

Shannon Toll offers what we believe is the first reading of the autobiography of Maria Tallchief, Osage ballerina and—in Toll’s riveting account—“postindian princess,” for the way she was able to both embody and complicate the stereotype. Reading against the grain of reviewers who assumed that Tallchief somehow relinquished her Indian identity to become a ballerina, Toll observes that Tallchief “achieved prima ballerina status during a time when no American dancer, Native or non-Native, had done so and, in the process, contradicted social expectations of Native people as tragic victims who were incapable of adapting to, let alone *shaping*, modernity” (52).

These explorations of Indigenous women’s tribally centered agency continue in Angela Van Essen’s reading of Louise Halfe’s (nêhiyaw) poetry. Van Essen looks specifically at Cree language terms in Halfe’s *The Crooked Good*, showing how such words reveal layers of meaning rooted in tribal ceremonies, histories, and sacred stories—connecting nicely to Andrea Riley Mukavetz’s insistence that Indigenous women’s stories are also methodologies.

We conclude this special issue with an essay on Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House*. The first essays on Erdrich in *SAIL* appeared in 1985, with a special issue on *Love Medicine*. Since then, *SAIL* has published more articles on Erdrich than just about any other writer (devoting another two-part special issue to her work in 1991–92 and yet another in 2000). To peruse these titles is to witness some of the trajectories of our profession, from our early fascination with issues of identity and blood, to work at the intersections of fields like feminism and animal studies, to readings grounded in tribal histories and epistemologies. Mary Paniccia Carden’s discussion of *The Round House* is, like the novel itself, rooted in Ojibwe tradition and Ojibwe sovereignty, suggesting just how far our field has come and where it might continue to grow.

June Scudeler and Siobhan Senier

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Females, the Strong Ones

Listening to the Lived Experiences of American Indian Women

ANDREA RILEY MUKAVETZ

Gentle reader, I come to you with a good heart.¹

In this essay, I am going to tell some stories about how American Indian women use story to theorize their lived experiences. One of the key points in this essay is the argument that we can and should use the stories American Indian women tell as theories for our research, writing, and everyday lives. Drawing from my oral history work with a group of multigenerational Odawa women, Indigenous worldviews, and an Indigenous research paradigm, I use story as methodology as a form of theorization that privileges relational and accountable knowledge making. Soon I will situate story as methodology and how it functions within Indigenous rhetorics and Indigenous research practices. But first I need to introduce myself to responsibly demonstrate right relations.

Boozhoo! Andrea Riley Mukavetz nindishinikaaz.² I am a member of the Chippewa of Thames First Nation. I come to you from Michigan in the Three Fires territory where I have spent most of my life and consider ancestral land. I am a mixed-raced Anishinaabekwe with Chaldean and Lebanese heritages. I was taught that it is important to bring one's audience into the story by acknowledging one's background and history to give the appropriate context necessary to understanding the story. Naturally, I am always asked how I came to have such a background. Yet my heritage deeply reflects the intercultural exchange of Metro Detroit when my paternal grandmother and grandfather met in the early twentieth century or when my maternal grandparents made the difficult decision to sell their store and move their large family from Baghdad to Michigan in the 1960s. To share my heritage is an opening to situate this story within Three Fires territory. From what I understand, the land is always crucial in an Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson;

Absolon; Simpson; Brooks). As Leanne Simpson writes, “If you want to learn about something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it. Get a practice” (18). To practice and theorize Nishnaabeg or Anishinaabeg worldviews is to be in an ontological, epistemological, and embodied state where the land as a being—as a gift from one’s ancestors—is central to how one thinks and practices that thinking.

As I draft this to you, it’s June. The strawberry moon has just passed, and the first of the Michigan strawberries have arrived. It has rained so much here that the air is sticky and sweet and green. Yesterday I took an evening walk with my family. On our way we saw a river otter splashing in one of the artificial ponds created for the nearby urban neighborhood developments. We stopped so our toddler-daughter could greet her friend. I’m growing another daughter at the moment, and as I put my hand to my stomach, I think about what this urban area looked like when my ancestors and the ancestors of the Odawa women visited or lived here long ago. I think that this is one of the significant things about living, dwelling, and writing about one’s home: it is always cultural continuance, always an opportunity to receive a teaching, and always a reminder of what it was, what it is, and what it could be. Michigan has been and will always be my home. If you are ever in the area, please stop by and see me. We’ll spend some time at *Ininwewi-gichigami*.

I’d like to tell you a story about the oral history work that I did with a group of multigenerational urban Odawa woman from Lansing, Michigan, whom I met and worked with while I was a graduate student at Michigan State University. It’s also a story about how preexisting relationships lead into research and intellectual experiences that further deepen and expand these relationships. I came to know these women and enter into this work due to the mentorship of the late Susan Applegate Krouse.³ Initially, Susan and I worked on a long-term project with Odawa elder Geri Roossien, gathering her stories to publish. During one of our first sessions together, Geri encouraged Susan and me to get more Odawa women together for us to make visible additional stories from the community. As you know, when an elder encourages you to do something for the community, you do it. Yet I think it’s important to be clear that I was introduced into a preexisting relationship between Susan and Geri. They came to know each other the way most Native people in urban areas find each other: through the local Indian center,

Nokomis, where they both served as board members. They were great friends. Since Susan's passing, Geri and I have remained good friends, and she continues to tell me stories about their friendship. As Geri says, "Susan's a real lady."

On three separate occasions, from February to March 2010, the women visited Michigan State University to share their lived experiences with community members, faculty, staff, and students. There were three themes to the talking circles: their roles and responsibilities in the "community and at home," at "work," and with "education." The talking circle participants are the following sets of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters: Geri Roossien, Jannus Cottrell, Debbie DeLeon, Athena Trentin, Wenona Singel, Loretta Singel, Sally Proctor, Emily Proctor, Ray Land, Reese Land, and Carol Jordan.⁴ They have held positions in various Lansing Indian centers working alongside Michigan State professors, students, and staff, or their daughters and grandchildren attend a four-year university. Many of these women have done educational programs at the college or secondary level, teach beadwork or language classes, coach softball leagues, and are known on the Michigan powwow trail.⁵ This essay offers a multigenerational and relational approach to building story as methodology that is reflective of Anishinaabeg worldviews and Three Fires territory. What follows is a complex woven series of stories that argue that story as a methodology is a necessary form of theory that makes space for Indigenous approaches to community-based writing and research. But the stories of the Odawa women also provide a language to describe and theorize the roles and responsibilities of these women *as* Odawa women in their language and on their terms. For me, to weave these arguments about the necessity of story and the roles and responsibilities of Native women creates an opportunity to explore, reflect, and consider the value that we put (and don't put) on the worldviews of Native women—as theorists *and* as members of our communities for those of us both in academia and outside of academia to learn from as writers, researchers, and thinkers. What I hope comes from these stories is an understanding of the constellated nature of how our Indigenous knowledges and community members impact our research and writing and how we can collaborate with community members to decolonize academic systems of beliefs.

THIS IS A NATIVE RHETORICS STORY

My formal training is in the subfield of Native (or Indigenous) rhetorics. Scholars of Native rhetorics dwell at the intersections of rhetoric and composition and American Indian studies. As I have written elsewhere, “Native rhetorics positions its scholarship and teaching within decolonial theories and social movements because of its commitment to privileging Indigenous ways of knowing, acknowledging one’s complicity in colonial rhetorics, and developing options for creating and sharing knowledge that does not use colonial rhetorical practices” (Riley Mukavetz 109). This emphasis on the making of knowledge can be further explored through the work of Malea Powell, who argues that Native rhetorics is the study of how meaning gets made. In “A Basket Is a Basket Because . . . : Telling a Native Rhetorics Story,” Powell observes that Native rhetorics scholars want to understand “how it’s made, how it means, how it holds” (471). In an interview with Andréa Davis, Powell offers a triad to engage in this study through space, culture, and bodies. She describes the triad as an orientation “to tradition and materials and the body . . . to understand the body, place, and culture . . . which Native Rhetorical Practices always circulate and constellate” (Davis). Both Powell and I would clarify that this triad and orientation is actually very old and situated within Indigenous worldviews and traditions. Additionally, it isn’t specific to rhetoric scholars but is an orientation we see Native people using in their everyday knowledge-making practices like beading, dancing, basket weaving, writing, and singing. To refer back to Leanne Simpson’s argument about land-based practices, when she describes *aki*—the land—as our teacher and asserts that we need to get out on the land *as* practice and *to* practice, I hear this as a Native rhetorics argument. We come to know through *how* we have known—what we have experienced in an interconnected, localized, embodied, ancestral way. We Native rhetorics scholars strive to make visible those practices as vital, valuable, and intellectual—we use these practices as our frameworks for knowledge making and teaching.

Earlier, I mentioned that story is my primary methodology both for this research project and for communicating research in my writing. In other words, it is through story that I understand and engage with the world around me. When I talk about story, I am drawing from the wealth of scholarship and traditions that understands story as a tool

for inquiry and as a practice to make knowledge. As Lisa King, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Anderson acknowledge,

The stories we tell each other tell us who we are, locate us in time and space and history and land, and suggest who gets to speak and how. . . . One might also say Indigenous epistemologies, framed thusly, are also therefore powerfully rhetorical, drawing on persuasive and reality-shifting language practices as old as time immemorial and just as applicable now as they have ever been. They might even help suggest a way out of the colonial stories that have blocked vision for so long, privileging some rhetorical storytelling traditions and silencing others. (3–4)

I dwell on the role of story because, as King, Gubele, and Anderson suggest, it is through story that we may find a way to privilege and prioritize Indigenous intellectual knowledges. Lee Maracle has argued that the hierarchical categories created for story, theory, and history reflect larger imperialist projects and actually represent Eurocentric ways of deciding “what” and “who” are considered intellectual.⁶ Maracle writes: “There is a story in every line of theory. The difference between us and European (predominantly white male) scholars is that we admit this, and present theory through story. We differ in the presentation of theory, not in our capacity to theorize” (7). There continues to be a robust discussion about the role of story as theory, story as story or something else, and how we as Native intellectuals grapple with how colonialism has impacted our knowledge-making practices. In the edited collection *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, editors Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinewinewistik Stark also argue that stories are a theoretical and methodological framework: “Anishinaabeg stories are roots; they are both the origins and the imaginings of what it means to be a participant in an ever-changing and vibrant culture in humanity” (1). Additionally, the editors acknowledge the possibilities and fluidity of stories. Stories are (and can be) theories, methodologies, roots, place markers, or signs.⁷

We’ve witnessed a similar approach of prioritizing Indigenous frameworks by introducing practices like literary separatism and intellectual sovereignty that center localized, Indigenous knowledges. Story as methodology offers us a constellated, relational approach to knowledge making that privileges the stories from our communities, treating them

like theories and incorporating them as both primary and secondary materials. In some ways, story as methodology has become the answer to how I have survived in academia while remaining my whole self. I understand and theorize through story, but it also allows me to maintain responsibility and relational accountability. As I live and dwell in this world, I naturally carry and learn from the stories of my relatives on an everyday basis. As I pursued an academic professional life, those stories became woven with the stories of scholarly elders—those whose work saved my life or provided me with an additional language and framework. Story as methodology allows me to treat both as equally vital and intellectual. As an Indigenous rhetorician, to story and to use storying practices are ways to honor another option—an Indigenous and decolonial one—to make and share knowledge.⁸ Already, you might notice that I am very present in this narrative. As Shawn Wilson gently reminds us, “Relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality” (7). And, as Thomas King writes, “stories are all that we are” (5). Lisa Brooks has described storytelling, like mapping, as an interactive activity (xxv). When putting Wilson, King, and Brooks together, I understand that a powerful story is participatory and relational. It is my responsibility to make myself present and transparent and create opportunities for my audience to create and remember stories with and alongside. Additionally, this creates a nonhierarchical and relational shift in how knowledge is created and shared. Where I might ask you to practice patience, Geri would say that “it’s not about learning patience but understanding.” I ask that you try to find a way into these stories and consider the stories you can tell alongside the women.

I’VE TOLD THIS STORY BEFORE

March 2009

I’m sitting at the Grand Traverse Pie Company with Little Traverse Bay Band grandmother Geri, mother Jannus, and granddaughter Emilia.⁹ We are drinking our tea or coffee and eating pastry as we talk about the rationale behind the talking circles. We made this appointment to talk about themes and discussion questions. As a second-year doctoral student and first-time researcher, I didn’t expect to talk about the project

trajectory or how language muddles the way we live in this world. But I should have, considering the obviousness of this conversation, since both Geri and Jannus have sat on numerous boards and committees for Lansing and Ingham County; both women have a long history of organizing the urban Indian population of mid-Michigan. Jannus asks, “What are you going to do with them?” She’s asking me about the future of the talking circles. I reply, “Well, I’m not sure yet. I know I want to have a space to honor the women’s stories, to draw attention to their significance to Lansing and Little Traverse history.” “Well, that’s fine, but my mother has been going to these for a long time, and nothing comes out of them.”

I am still struck by the concept of nothingness. I realize that Susan and I need to think both short term and long term about the project and include the women in these conversations. We need to show them that we are invested in the possibilities. Initially, we thought that this project would be in addition to Geri’s life history project. Yet Jannus’s critique of the transparency of the project encourages me to realize that I have a responsibility to do more. The women want something tangible to come out of this project. On a daily basis, I repeat to myself: “This shouldn’t be a waste of time.” Jannus says something like, “You need to give this project longevity.” I ask her, “What do you think I should do with this project?” She says, “I don’t know, but something to make it last, something that can help future generations.” Geri says, “I want this project to be available in schools and libraries for the children.” Geri has always been concerned with making resources available to future generations of Native people. In fact, her concern is why she wanted to record and publish her life history: to cultivate and sustain knowledge for our youngsters. I keep this conversation in mind while Susan and I plan the next stages of the project.¹⁰

I re-tell this story because I can’t show how Geri and Jannus critique Western discourses on leadership without it. During this conversation they gently critiqued and encouraged me to listen to them and learn from their experiences. By putting relationships at the center of these theories, I can make visible moments of struggle and the mistakes that I learned from and am still learning from. Now the granddaughter has found free pie samples and is taking mini-soufflé cups of pie to her grandmother, mother, and me. We have switched from project rationale

and longevity to discussing the implications of the concept of “leadership” for the talking circles. One of the first questions that I asked the women is if they identify as a leader.

Geri says that she doesn’t think of herself as a leader: she prefers to remain in the background. I hear this statement as a *practiced* theory—an emphasis in the *doing*. Geri’s theory is informed by her experiences surviving boarding school, living a life of sobriety, and working as a substance abuse counselor for American Indians and their families. As Geri told me stories about overcoming alcoholism and becoming a Native American crisis counselor, she always emphasized how her everyday practices informed her worldview.¹¹ But it was also crucial for her to always find joy and thankfulness. She often connected these ideas to her identity as someone in recovery and becoming a grandmother. By refusing to be labeled as a leader and then offering another role, she theorizes the cultural, local, and generational nuances between elder and leader. For Geri, this means she removes herself from the spotlight and instead gives advice and directs from the background. She makes herself visible by being present. In Terese Guinsatao Monberg’s work with Pinay rhetor Dorothy Cordova, she highlights how Cordova theorizes her position within community building to standing *behind the podium* (5). I share this additional example to show how non-Western women have often used language to theorize the space they work in while rejecting an expected presence from someone who “runs” an organization. For decades, Geri served on Lansing boards, mainly as the secretary, treasurer, or board member, never as the speaker or president. During our conversations, Geri shared many stories about when she was encouraged to run for these positions, but she chose not to because doing so was counterintuitive to how she understands her identity. While telling me stories for her book, Geri would explain that her coworkers would often nominate her for these positions regardless of how many times she rejected the offer.

As Geri tells me stories about her coworkers nominating her for more visible positions, I am reminded of being in particular academic spaces and struggling to speak a language that accurately describes the work of my community in a way that shows the long-term significant impact they have made intellectually, historically. I am reminded how I have been disciplined to associate a refusal to name oneself a leader with imagery of being overly modest or humble. We might desire to continue

labeling Geri as a leader to show that we value her, especially when we come to realize that the city of Lansing named a day after her to recognize her achievements or that she remains one of the only Native American crisis counselors in the state of Michigan and continues to do consulting work at the age of eighty. But I would ask those people to think about “remaining in the background” as a practice that Geri enacts as survivance (survival plus resistance). Drawing from Gerald Vizenor’s work, Powell recognizes survivance as a rhetorical strategy used to move from object to subject status. We must reflect on our desire to revise Geri’s theory to fit our own worldviews or need to justify her actions *as* intellectual *to* Westernized frameworks. These moments when we want to reframe, redefine her identity into language that is more comfortable for us are sites of paracolony tension.¹² I encourage us to ask, “How do her racialized, classed, gendered practices complicate the ways in which I understand power and survival?”

As I hear Geri position herself in the background, I feel and see her discuss the complexity of negotiating power and responsibility while practicing traditions within the urban environment and among Natives and non-Natives. Geri is aware of how the paracolony world sees her: as elderly, uneducated, a recovering alcoholic, and unable to be literate in certain disciplinary discourses. And so she removes herself from those archetypal depictions of contemporary Native women to a spatial position where she can create things—make programs or offer counsel in smaller groups. To remain in the background is a practiced space of knowledge making where she cultivates a place for future generations to survive. And in thinking about this, I feel Geri urging me to theorize the *background* in relation to the mundane and the rhetorical spaces women of color inhabit for re-visionary purposes—for survivance. As I think more of how Geri creates theory through embodied, everyday practice, I understand that the background is a space where both Natives and non-Natives must work in separate racial and gendered communities but also come together for joint projects like school functions, committees, and employment.

For those who honor paracolony knowledge practices and histories, Geri is invisible. *She’s a grandmother*. Geri relies on that invisibility to create, educate, and serve as a resource. She doesn’t bother herself with those who cannot listen. Yet when she returns to Native communities, they understand the significance of her invisible but tangible presence.

She's our grandmother. Geri teaches me that invisibility and visibility practices change depending upon the space one dwells in—from the cultural community one works with and for. And where these cultural communities are interconnected and constellated, language is community specific. These Odawa women draw attention to how American Indian women make themselves visible and invisible depending upon how they form relationships, how they share knowledge, and how they use language to create, build, and cultivate. When Geri tells me about the recovery aspect of her life history, most of the stories are a series of client success stories in which she explains *how* her clients (mainly urban Native peoples) overcame their addictions. I understand these client success stories as a way for Geri to discuss her own success and recovery. Recovery is not solely about Geri's individual abstinence from alcohol but about how she dedicates her life to assisting Native peoples to overcome their addictions. I understand this practice as a way to emphasize relationality within theories and practices of survivance.

In the talking circles, Geri says that “it was learning to lead a sober life” that encouraged her to take college courses at Davenport University and become a substance abuse counselor. I hear Geri relate the process of recovery to a presence in society. In doing so, Geri makes a distinction between civic duty/presence and invisibility. One can remain in the background and still have an active presence in her community. Geri's practice of remaining in the background relates to how she enacts Odawa teachings in crisis counseling. This connection emphasizes the difference between what is seen, heard, and felt. Recovery, like storying, is about relationships—relationality. There isn't an origin or a center; instead, there is a web of responsibility and accountability. Geri urges me to think about how Odawa teachings and theories have and should be used to heal Native peoples from addiction.

As Geri shares stories about how she uses Odawa teachings, I feel her urge me to share and exchange stories on how to use teachings as rhetorical practices to make and build. That is how I try to heal and recover. But at this moment, in this coffee shop, I don't get any of this yet. It takes me a year of telling these stories again and again to hear and see how she creates theory—how she forms a deliberate position. It's in the retelling—keeping the stories alive and feeding them—where I can hear her teachings. I ask her, “Why do you reject the word ‘leader’?” Geri doesn't answer me, probably because she already has, and I haven't

heard it yet. But I *feel* that she has said something significant because I remember my breath catching—my shoulders softening. I start to realize that I am mishearing Geri when Jannus, relying on familiar theoretical language, explains her mother's theory to me. I imagine that they both seem a little annoyed that I don't get it yet, but I am not sure about this.

Jannus says, "Leadership is a masculinist construct." "Oh," I reply. And then, after that, everything comes together. My breath slows, and my body sighs in relief and understanding. Jannus uses institutional language in order to show me that I misheard her mother. Where Geri might not have the same relationship to these words or resists explaining her strategies, Jannus relies on institutional discourses—academic discourses—to illuminate what she already knows to be true, what she already hears, feels, and sees. During the talking circles, Jannus had an opportunity to reflect on her relationship to formal education and Odawa teachings. When she was in school, she would hear stereotypes or misinformation about Native peoples and didn't have the words to speak back. She recalls, "I felt muted—I didn't know how to say, 'Well, that's not true.' I don't want my children to be in a position of feeling muted. Now I can be a resource." Jannus practices this role by sharing knowledge on how to negotiate multiple discourses and theories. Jannus *takes the time* to explain what she hears to people like herself or like me: mixed Natives who have not had the opportunity to grow up with the traditions but spend adulthood learning them and reorienting themselves. To be a resource is to be in constant negotiation of building, deconstructing, and rebuilding.

By juxtaposing her educational background to her identity and responsibility, Jannus relates her ability to negotiate institutions and to serve as a resource to her mixed-blood identity:

I hope we can bring back our Native history—our Michigan Indian history here—it's been a continued effort on our part. It's been good—it's been enlightening for me—finding her [Geri] history and thus finding a part of my history as well. My Native community was the Lansing Indian Center—it's a very different environment than growing up on a reserve or around the aunts and grandmothers. I see the political and business work of being Indian to bring community to a fragmented environment like Lansing. My politics have been developed from this perspective—

I've seen what it's like to stay alive in this setting and what can make it crumble. . . . I got these degrees not to work in anthropology, but I needed something—some resource. Fortunately, the professors I learned under are strong advocates for Native peoples. Now I can be a resource.

Jannus moves from the conditions of her mixed-blood identity to describing the conditions she grew up in. She makes these connections as a way to argue what she had to do in order to be a resource. She understands herself to be someone much more complex than a translator. Like her mother, Jannus uses her lived experiences to fill an absence in the ways she understands the roles and responsibilities of American Indian women—their history as Michigan Indians. Instead, she is able to acknowledge and fill an absence; where Jannus may not have had these resources as she grew up, she becomes them. She inhabits an Indigenous space made for her and expands this space for others to join her. To be a resource is to be in constant negotiation of building, deconstructing, and rebuilding the discourses and social systems one straddles, walks through, within, alongside of, and underneath.

EDUCATION: A SEAT AT THE TABLE

During our third and last circle, “Education and Leadership,” the women offered stories from their lived experiences to explore the challenges of negotiating formal education with informal and traditional teachings. Le Anne Silvey, our moderator, asks the women, “How do you see the role of education in the lives of Native people?”

Debbie, who is sitting next to her daughter Athena, speaks first: “It’s important, to change policy, we need to be at the table and be seen as equals. I’ve always believed that being equal, in terms of any kind of education, we always have to try harder and be better to be equal.” By this point, the audience knows Debbie’s relationship to making policy, specifically, her twenty years of experience creating programs for Indigenous youth and her successful career as Ingham County commissioner. Debbie’s argument for a seat at the table becomes even more complicated when we realize the university is only five miles away from the capitol and Debbie’s political career. The table is an actual *place* that reflects her lived experiences as an Odawa woman negotiating policy

with non-Natives. The table also represents a practice on how to advocate for the survival of Native peoples. Jannus continues, “My responsibility as a Native American woman is to have a seat at that table and a responsibility to myself and my family and to hope that for my children.” By continuing the metaphor, Jannus theorizes her lived experiences in relation to Debbie’s personal experiences. This is theory making in the moment. In both stories, the women relate their history to their hopes for future generations.

These theories are difficult to hear because the women engage in complex rhetorical moves where they speak both figuratively and literally, personally and communally, and reference both the historical past and the personal present to show future generations what these practices have entailed and will entail. I witness these rhetorical strategies throughout many, if not, all of the circle theories, but I think it’s especially significant for the women’s theories on education because of how the women speak across historical moments to acknowledge the pain, loneliness, and empowerment of learning—of teaching.

When Wenona speaks, she changes the metaphor from a spatial description to images of fear associated with upward mobility: “When you have the formal degree, it’s like a key that unlocks that door. In some ways, it’s unfair that so many opportunities arise with a piece of paper. We need in our community lawyers, doctors, and social workers, and scientists. We need them to give back to our communities.” Instead of continuing the metaphor, Wenona changes it, and in doing so she speaks to another discourse: the critiques Native peoples receive from their community when they receive a formal degree. The change of metaphor happens almost seamlessly and in the process creates an opportunity for Raye and Stephanie to historicize what Native peoples’ occupations were before they were allowed to seek formal educations. Raye and Stephanie share how they didn’t think they needed formal education. Raye tells us, “Native people relied on the factories for good work.” Raye’s observation resonates for the community members of Lansing because she is referring to the Big Three Factories in Southwest Detroit and the Oldsmobile Factory in Lansing. She reminds us that the factories served as important opportunities for Native peoples and specifically for Michigan residents. I think back to my paternal grandfather, who left reserve land in Muncey, Ontario, and started working at Ford. He met my grandmother, a cafeteria worker, and courted her soon

after. My maternal grandparents worked as janitors and cafeteria people soon after immigrating to Detroit from Baghdad. The factories hold the histories of Michigan: of Michigan Indians and settlers. These histories remind us of what we had, what we lost, and what we had to do to build again to survive.

Sally shares that “college” only came up once when she was about to graduate high school. She says, “It’s the first and only time I had ever heard someone mention ‘college.’ I didn’t go, you had to have money, you had to have everything.” Both elders offer historical perspectives from when college was not a possibility or an obvious path. By situating the complexity of pursuing a formal education while being a Native person historically, Raye and Sally render themselves visible in Michigan (Indian) history. As a result, they create a Michigan Indian rhetorical history in which Odawa women are more visible. As Geri responds last to this question, she acknowledges the significance of taking up space in an educational institution:

Formal education is necessary, and it gives us an opportunity to be present in the community—kinda like, holding up your head and saying, “I’m here.” When my daughter was going to U of M [University of Michigan, Ann Arbor], I would take a day off from work and go with her, find out where she parked, meet her professors, and have lunch with her.¹³ The education gets higher with each generation: my mother went up to sixth grade, I went to high school and then Davenport, and then my daughter. . . . Just us being here is evidence that we are doing the right thing and are on the right track.

I find this an extraordinarily complex statement because she simultaneously engages in mobilization and spatial rhetoric. Historically, the Anishinaabeg have a strong relationship with all the Great Lakes. This relationship resonates as Geri reminds the circle audience about the exchange of knowledge and thus the exchange of power. I hear Geri recognize the spatial importance of this discussion, of the women traveling to the university to share knowledge—to sit in the Lake Superior Room at Michigan State University and share stories.

But I don’t understand this last part until I read Janice Gould’s essay “The Problem of Being ‘Indian’: One Mixed-Blood’s Dilemma,” in which she argues that “there is not a university in ‘America’ built on what was

not once Native land” (81). I didn’t know about Gould’s essay until I had lunch with two of my teachers, who are mentoring me through my first conference experience. We’re in Tucson at the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association conference. I’m a first-time attendee and feeling in awe of being around so many Native people and yet so out of place because I have never been at a resort before. I start to tell my teachers about my own insecurities at the conference and in academia—how I feel out of place. And this is when my dear relatives, Indigenous women in academia, offer me Janice Gould as a resource to understand that I belong in the university because it’s on Indian land.

As the women speak about their experiences with education, they take the time to show that their stories are deeply in response to the stories previously told. This relational practice is an Indigenous form of theorization that also serves as an invitation to examine my (and now our) relationship(s) to them and the stories they tell and as a rhetorical approach to hear them in their words and on their terms. I hope it is evident that this is how I have been communicating throughout the article to further show the impact of this form of theorization. I use relationality to build a framework and to hear theory, while the women use it to create and share knowledge. They use it to practice their roles, in the words of Jannus, as “Native American Indian women.” What I’ve heard thus far is that the women use their stories about informal education to discuss how the relationships between generations of women reflect the roles they practice and the positions they take. Yet we have more stories to hear and learn from.

We begin with Sally, who has had a lived experience that is much different from that of the rest of the women. She shares that she encouraged her children to not learn the traditions because she didn’t think that type of education was necessary. She says, “Emily got me involved in that.” Sally reminds me that to story and to remember aren’t methodologically easy, as doing so propels us to directly invoke generational trauma. Additionally, Sally draws attention to the crucial relationships between youngsters and elders. We’re at a time when youngsters have a different type of access to Indigenous knowledges and practices. We have to remember that the relationship between elders and youngsters and our roles in passing down and receiving Indigenous knowledge look and feel different from just thirty years ago. I am reminded of a time a few springs ago when my aunties told me that they could never

imagine the possibility of going to university. They were trying to wrap their minds around how the university has changed for me to publicly express my mixed-race identity and write about Native ideas (safely). I felt my incredible privilege in that moment. I felt sadness. Then they asked me to share my work with them, to share the scholarly language that I learned with them.

Raye recalls, “For years we have traveled the powwow circuit. It helps keep us who we are.” Raye’s relationship to *traveling* to the powwows has encouraged and cultivated a connection to Native teachings and practices. Earlier, the audience learned that Raye is responsible for the (Indigenous) education of her granddaughters. The girls used to travel with Raye and their grandfather before he passed. Like Geri, Raye lives with her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren. As the younger generations offer their stories, I begin to notice a complex discussion on negotiating formal education and traditional knowledge. The women recognize the discursive implications of learning traditional teachings, as well as balancing these teachings with formal education. Wenona, Harvard graduate, associate professor of law, and current tribal judge, argues:

So often, when you attend a university, you do not have the opportunity to learn about your tribe’s language or culture. I was thinking about a student’s experience, like Indian law. What do you learn when you study Indian law? For the most part, it consists of cases that were drafted by the Supreme Court that denigrate the tribes on so many levels. As a Native student, that’s very difficult if that’s your primary case of inspiration. That’s why informal or traditional education is very important, the opportunity to learn from elders, participate in the same ceremonies that your parents or grandparents got to participate in. Like many current generations, we didn’t have that opportunity available to us. The stories that we learn from our family or our community are critical, they ground us, they give us a deeper sense of values and, feeling more confident, that you have a purpose or calling to life.

Wenona encourages Native youth to seek a formal education and yet is understanding of the type of educational experience they will have. She emboldens students to return to their communities and affirms that our communities can offer strategies on navigating institutional rules. In

many ways, Wenona's observations remind me of Amanda Cobb's writings on Comanche activist LaDonna Harris: "These leaders and activists have been—and are still—teaching our communities how to move through the processes of decolonization and national building to more fully exercise our sovereignty. In other words, they have been teaching us how to recover and how to flourish" (63).¹⁴

Jannus explains her relationship to traditional teachings as well: "My mom was a boarding school generation person. We come from a detached relationship with the community. The traditional education, every time we have the opportunity, we take as much as we can. I feel very much like a child in that sense. They very nicely compliment each other, and it gives us a language to share with other communities. It bridges some of those gaps, the Native American experience and the book education." I hear Wenona and Jannus theorizing the situatedness and complexity of honoring multiple types of Indigenous knowledge practices. Where both women explore the role of identity and space in relation to pursuing education, Jannus recognizes that her lack of traditional knowledge became an opening to occupy a different position—a different type of Indigenous knowledge. I am immediately reminded about her practiced theory of "being a resource" and how she enacts this role and responsibility due to her perceived initial lack of language.

Thus far I have heard a complicated and nuanced discussion on how tradition, knowledge, and practice are always reflective of time, community, and relationships. I think it's important to emphasize that Jannus is speaking to and alongside an urban Native community in an urban area. Thinking back to Gould's argument, Native people are drawn to the university partly because of our relationship to the land it was built upon. The younger women theorize the desire to be a Native in the university by acknowledging how the university serves as a symbol for the relationship between knowledge and colonial impact. Athena offers a realization on what can be lost while pursuing a formal education:

I like what you said. . . . Everything complements each other. The balance between informal and formal needs to be negotiated on a personal level. My skin was white enough so no one questioned me, but I wasn't supposed to bring that world in the classroom. Now that I've gone further and further with my formal education, I've lost it. Now that I'm back home, I can be connected again.

As everyone's been talking, I've realized that I lost it. Something's been missing, but I think I realized what it was. Getting a formal education helps you become interculturally competent.

Athena addresses her fears of losing the traditional teachings and wonders if her formal education replaced her traditional one. She encourages me to think about how institutional discourses encourage forgetting instead of memory and how to create an institutional space where all knowledges are valued, protected, and encouraged. Athena's mother, Debbie, reminds her that "what you might think is lost is still in your heart." It's always in these last moments of the DVD where I find my breath catching—unable to exhale, in fear of not hearing. As Debbie looks to her daughter, who is wiping away tears, I too wipe tears from my cheeks.

FEMALES, THE STRONG ONES

Le Anne asks, "What is the role of women in family and communities, and is it different from the role of men?" As the women choose Jannus, Debbie, and Wenona to answer this question, I think back to when Raye introduced herself and family in the first talking circle. As she shared that she only has daughters and female grandchildren, she remarked, "Females, the strong ones." Then she tilted her head back and chuckled. Of course, she offered this theory as a way to get a laugh out of her audience, yet I cannot help but repeat it to myself or bring it up while sharing stories with fellow Native women academics. She persuades her audience to listen to the / through laughter—a reminder of what we already know to be true. It's the laughter that brings it to the surface. *Females, the strong ones*. Jannus responds first: "Our role as Native American women is what we are doing here—we are transferring knowledge to the next generation. With each bit of information, we are attaching our own experiences and allowing it to grow with our children and hoping our children will do the same for the next generation." As Jannus discusses the politics of making history, making theory, she connects it not only to the personal but to the belief that future generations need to continue making and sustaining it for the theory/history to be viable.

I hear Jannus returning to what Geri observed much earlier—that Indigenous theory is practiced, it's in the doing. Like Geri, Jannus refers

to the “here” as the knowledge exchange occurring in the talking circles, as well as the personal present and how it is transferrable across the spaces the women inhabit. Debbie follows: “Sometimes, we just have to keep the boys in line. . . . I’ve learned that even though the men were the so-called leaders of our tribe, it was the women who picked them. . . . Women didn’t dance in the arena, it was their job to stand outside the arena and watch the men dance to pick the leaders.” Debbie takes a more historical perspective by referring to a moment in time that has long passed, and yet, for me, it still feels current, as well as metaphorical. Debbie encourages me to ask, What does our arena look like now? What does it look like for men to dance and for women to pick them as “leaders” in the urban area? Also, Debbie speaks to the heart of Geri’s theory, “remaining in the background.” To practice their roles as Odawa women, they look to their lived experiences and histories to understand how they make themselves visible. We—as scholars in American Indian studies or American Indian scholars—need to take our cues from American Indian women like the talking circle ladies to learn from. They are our teachers, theorists, and community leaders.

Lastly, Wenona says, using her marriage as an example, “We are egalitarian, but it does seem in our families that the women have more focus on the glue that keeps us together, whether it’s taking the initiative to plan events so connections can remain strong.” During these last few moments I notice how all of the women refrain from rationalizing themselves as knowledge sharers, mothers, watchers, and planners. They do not tell us why they chose these positions, but they do tell us *how* they practice them and know them to be true. In doing so, they provide a framework to move out of being a defender or a justifier, instead drawing attention to how their practices can be recognized as intellectual—to encourage us to *take the time* to honor the seemingly mundane.¹⁵

THEORY BEGINS WITH A STORY, TOO

Dear readers, I’ve provided you with stories from within the local community of Lansing, Michigan. The stories are deeply connected to the spaces and places where the women came together to create and share knowledge: Michigan State University, coffee shops and kitchen tables, classrooms, and the powwow trail. While I was doing oral history work with Geri Roossien, she kept coming back to her insistence on sharing

this knowledge and making it available to our Indigenous youth in the schools. As a researcher and younger person, I try to carry these stories with me across multiple spaces. For me, this practice of carrying, like retelling, is a way to feed the stories and keep them going. Earlier I mentioned that I believe these stories can be heard as teachings on how to navigate dominant spaces, such as institutions of higher education. What I mean by this is that these women provide us with another set of practices and a language to think about Indigenous ways of seeing and knowing and identifying each other as vital and contributing members of a community. Too often I think that we are forced to describe ourselves in a language that does not really fit our worldview and roles and responsibilities. Yet these women have provided us with a way to think about the relationship between Indigenous identity and how education and gender impact the way that identity is practiced, understood, and communicated. In so many conversations with Geri about this project, she recognized that more work has to be done with how academia understands and writes about American Indians. By storying and thinking about how to privilege stories as theory, we are able to intervene in heteronormative beliefs of what constitutes intellectual and valuable knowledge. In addition, we can engage in an Indigenous and ultimately decolonial option to doing research when we no longer simply write about our communities but carry our communities with us and listen to them as we live and work in academia. I hope that you will help me feed the stories and keep them going for present and future generations. I hope you tell some stories in return. Miigwetch for listening.

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NOTES

1. Here I invoke Shawn Wilson, whose work on Indigenous research paradigms continues to help me understand how to do community-based research.

2. I am slowly learning Anishinaabemowin as an adult. Any mistakes are mine and mine alone.

3. In July 2010 Susan walked on from a hard battle with cancer. Due to her passing, the completion of the oral history projects was delayed and then reframed. I continue to miss my dear friend and teacher. The project was undertaken by Susan Applegate Krouse, Le Anne Silvey, and Andrea Riley Mukavetz, talking circles with multigenerational Odawa women from Little Traverse Bay Band, March 2010, Michigan State University, East Lansing.

4. All of the women from the talking circles gave me verbal permission to use the talking circles in my research. Yet for this article I was required to get additional written permission. Recently, I lost contact with some of the women and was unable to locate them in time. Due to this, some of the women's names are pseudonyms.

5. Since the talking circles, all of the women have advanced their careers or educational paths, or they are differently acknowledged in their communities. For example, Debbie DeLeon was elected the vice chair of the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians. President Barack Obama nominated Wenona Singel to be a member of the advisory board of the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation.

6. Additionally, Malea Powell has made a similar argument in "Listening to Ghosts: A (Non)argument."

7. In *Stories through Theories / Theories through Stories*, editors Gordon Henry Jr., Nieves Pascual Soler, and Silvia Martinez-Falquina explore the types of critiques that story or critical theory offers. Where the editors see story and theory as separate and rooted in different intellectual traditions, this collection is useful in understanding the historical circumstances for making the argument that story, history, and theory are merely categories that we created to develop a hierarchy of knowledge and intellect.

8. Here I am drawing from Walter Mignolo's work in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*.

9. I've told versions of this story in conference presentations and my dissertation. Additionally, more stories about the talking circles as theories can be found in "Towards a Cultural Rhetorics Methodology: Making Research Matter with a Group of Multi-generational Odawa Women."

10. The oral history project with Geri is complete, and I am currently querying presses. The talking circles project is being transformed into something to share with multiple audiences.

11. Cristo Rey is a Hispanic / American Indian community center that offers a variety of recovery services. It continues to be a resource for Lansing's Hispanic and Native populations, but due to budget problems, it does not offer as many services as it did when it was initially founded. Cristo Rey continues to offer itself as a space for Lansing Hispanic and American Indian communities to gather for Day of the Dead, Ghost Supper, and other traditional gatherings.

12. I understand paracolonial as the ongoing effects of colonial rhetorical practices specific to landbases, spaces, or places. Institutions like universities are prime examples of paracolonial spaces and important sites for decoloniality and delinking from colonial rhetorical practices.

13. This practice of parents attending class is also common with Middle Eastern families and their daughters.

14. Cobb's scholarship on LaDonna Harris impacted much of my own argument. In "Powerful Medicine," Cobb acknowledges that when we speak about leadership, it is often in a Western, hierarchical position, where one person holds all of the power. Using Harris's words and practices, Cobb reframes the practice and language of leadership to be nonhierarchical, community-based, and focused on building. I see this article extending Cobb's discussion on leadership by drawing attention to how these women reframe their identities and roles in their communities.

15. In *Traces of a Stream: Literary and Social Change among African American Women*, Jacqueline Jones Royster makes a similar argument. In fact, the following subheading is inspired by her research.

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Gothic Silence

S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema*, the Battle of the Little Bighorn,
and the Indigenous Unspeakable

AMY GORE

As far back as I can remember, I belonged to a secret society of Indian women, meeting around a kitchen table in a conspiracy to bring the past into the present. I listened, their stories settling forever in my blood, and I knew the stories were told and told not for carrying but for keeping. They heard, and they taught me to hear, the truth in things not said. They listened, and they taught me to listen, in the space between words.

Betty Louise Bell (Cherokee), *Faces in the Moon*

In a recent special issue on Indigenous autobiography, Michelle Raheja addresses silence as a crucial category of Indigenous writing. She identifies “intentional rhetorical silences” as a key strategy in narrations of the self and of tribal knowledges, as well as a strategy of engagement with “white-controlled literary and publishing practices” during the nineteenth century (88). Rhetorical silences act in complex ways: while textual moments of silence may indicate a variety of meanings and do not unequivocally equal passivity or victimhood, silence paradoxically works to “reveal speech” (Glenn 3) and operates through such rhetorical choices as “unexpected words, awkward grammatical constructions, rhetorical or thematic dissonances that mark the pressure of untold stories” (Wald 1). Rather than an “absence,” then, Indigenous rhetorical silences exist as veiled or underexamined literary elements that fissure and press against the story line. These narrative silences become especially attractive to Indigenous women writers who operate under the double bind of race and gender and who witnessed the spreading devastations of colonization during the nineteenth century. For them, strategic silence often became a way to gesture toward the unspeakable, a term often used with-

in gothic literary criticism to describe historical trauma and its various means of cultural, linguistic, and generational breaks.

The unspeakable inhabits a specific type of silence. While rhetorical silences may work to reveal speech, the prefix “un” tells us that the unspeakable, in contrast, continually negates the act of speech and arises from a complex psychological tension of expression and repression.¹ Adrienne Rich beautifully explains the difference by contrasting the “unspoken” with the unspeakable: “Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult to come by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language—this will become, not merely unspoken, but *unspeakable*” (199). Teresa Goddu reinforces Rich’s definition by claiming for the American gothic in general, “Although the gothic is not the only form that articulates abjection, it serves as a primary means of speaking the unspeakable in American literature” (10). What the unspeakable points to varies within each text and each literary canon, but for Indigenous texts it often reveals a cultural and political perspective of colonization that is different from its counterparts in the same literary period and historical context.

Looking to the unspeakable to define Indigenous gothic literature yields much earlier manifestations than previously acknowledged. Instead of turning to contemporary Indigenous literature for the beginnings of its interjections into the gothic, as when Michelle Burnham asserts, “*Indian Killer* marks the arrival of an Indigenous Gothic” (21), or even reaching for the gothic elements that may already exist in Indigenous storytelling before European contact, as Burnham suggests in “Is There an Indigenous Gothic?” (226), I propose that an attention to the Indigenous unspeakable creates a bridge between precontact and contemporary readings of the Indigenous gothic genre by opening up the corpus of Indigenous writing during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries that worked within the throes of colonialism. The Indigenous unspeakable thus productively redirects scholarly inquiries from a search within a text’s *manifest* content for an Indigenous “monster” figure, such as a trickster or windigo, to a text’s *latent* content of historical trauma, instigated by the experiences of genocide and colonization. Within this purview, a gothic tradition populates Indigenous

fiction as early as the first known novel authored by a Native woman, S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* (1891).

As a sentimental novel, *Wynema* traces the maturation of the eponymous Muscogee (also known as the Mvskoke, Muskogee, or Creek Nation) character whose assimilation into American culture dually culminates in her Western education and her marriage to a non-Native character, Robin Weir.² Throughout the text *Wynema* receives a vigorous political education alongside her Shakespeare and Dickens, proving to the male characters that women can comprehend the scope of political events they read in the newspapers. These newspapers, however, reveal as much about the novel's silent disengagements as its overt political engagements. Although silences appear throughout the text as the characters struggle to express their feelings, certain silences function explicitly as gothic silences—the Indigenous unspeakable. The newspapers, along with the novel's time line, asks its readers to pay attention to what is unable to be directly addressed, those traumatic historical events repressed in the Indigenous imagination at this political moment. The most significant of these within the novel's time line, the Battle of the Little Bighorn, represented a major military victory for Indigenous people, but it also instigated one of the largest media backlashes in Native American history, inciting the outrage of public sentiment and the potential for violent retaliation. As an Indigenous gothic text, *Wynema* embeds the unspeakable in order to offer greater insights into an author and period of Indigenous literature considered largely assimilationist and in doing so privileges a Native perspective and experience during the social violence of the so-called Progressive Era of the late nineteenth century.

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE INDIGENOUS GOTHIC

Marginalized writers possess a long history with the gothic tradition, and yet the undervaluing of their generic expression points toward greater systemic silences present within multiethnic and Indigenous literary criticism. Toni Morrison speaks of this systemic silence, which she identifies as the unspeakable, as twofold: the “intellectual feats” critics perform in order to erase the presence of minorities from literary traditions and the “significant and underscored omissions” existent within the literature itself (“Unspeakable” 11, 6). Taking Morrison's lead, several

scholars began to connect her concepts to expressions of the gothic in ethnic literature. Zoe Trodd, for example, identifies the difficulties of speech and language as symptomatic within the African American literary tradition, especially in regard to the silencing or misrepresentation of historical memory and “the ‘truth’ about black experience with white words, white requirements for expression, white limits of comprehension” (304). Looking broadly across multiethnic and Indigenous literatures, Kathleen Brogan focuses on the presence of ghosts, placing them within a long-standing gothic tradition but arguing for the additional role they serve: “an attempt to recover and make social use of a poorly documented, partially erased cultural history” (2). Her words mark the transition in gothic scholarship from the relatively narrow interest in the anxieties of an individual psyche to those of a collective psyche concerned over the communication and survival of cultural history. More recently, Carlos Gallego identifies “historical critique” as an essential characteristic in expressions of the gothic within minority literatures, stemming from the “psycho-political anxieties” of their marginalization (175, 176). He claims the modern gothic “quickly became a favorite among authors interested in foregrounding the marginalization and disenfranchisement” of minority groups, “usually expressed in terms of identity confusion and a socio-political powerlessness” (175).

Indigenous studies scholarship entered into these conversations nearly twenty-five years ago with Alan Velie’s formative article, “Gerald Vizenor’s Indian Gothic” (1992), followed closely by Louis Owens’s “‘Grinning Aboriginal Demons’: Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart* and the Indian’s Escape from Gothic” (1993). Both Velie and Owens identified the white characters instead of the Indians as the monstrous, gothic “Other” in Gerald Vizenor’s 1978 novel, *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*. They claimed the narrative as one of “horror written from an Indian point of view” (Velie 75) and an inversion of “the inherited paradigms of the American gothic” (Owens 71). More recent scholarship continues in this vein, focusing largely on the Indigenous gothic as an inversion of the American gothic: Burnham points out the ways in which Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer* (1996) “reformulates the politics of gothic sensation” (4), citing the violence the novel perpetrates toward its white characters and the traditions of the American gothic itself in order to label the novel as “an Indigenous anti-colonial gothic” (8). In *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*

(2009), editors Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte note the frequent depictions of Indigenous people as the monstrous unknown and reflect on the gradual “appropriation” of the gothic by Canadian writers for a different perspective of colonial history (xvi).

While an anticolonialist agenda may constitute the gothic in certain texts, the Indigenous gothic may be more productively theorized as an encounter with the unspeakable of Indigenous historical trauma rather than as a Native American imitation of a European American gothic tradition. This recentering better aligns with Craig Womack’s assertion that “we *are* the canon” (6), not in order to mistakenly alienate Indigenous literature from other literary bodies but in order to establish its own traditions that invoke its own theories, tropes, and perspectives.³ This allows a broader, more autonomous view of the Indigenous gothic and enables a richer examination of its silences, specifically for the ways in which the unspeakable manifests and thus preserves muted cultural history.⁴ In addition, this reconsideration of the Indigenous gothic joins a broader critical conversation on Indigenous literature’s engagement with genre. For example, *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature* (2014) dedicates one of its four sections to Indigenous engagements with genres, and of the eleven essays included in this section, all of them address the ways in which Indigenous authors “make and remake” genres (Kurzen 202), adeptly transforming them “to meet the current intellectual and social needs facing specific Indigenous communities” (Teuton 319). In Jodi Byrd’s essay, “Red Dead Conventions: American Indian Transgeneric Fictions,” she explicitly advances the transformative expressions of Indigenous genres like the gothic when she argues that these texts “experiment,” “refuse categorization,” “genre-bend,” and “reimagin[e]” traditional generic conventions and definitions (346). Speaking specifically of Callahan’s *Wynema* and as one of several scholars to label the novel as assimilationist, Teuton considers it “unparalleled as a story of Indigenous cultural shame and wholesale conversion to white Christian America,” yet he still considers Indigenous genre as “a space [for Indigenous writers] to experiment with Indigenous cultural change, in which characters work through the risks and consequences of various responses to American colonialism” (318). My essay calls upon Indigenous genre scholarship to reconsider the Indigenous gothic not as an imitation of the European American gothic but as an Indigenous-centered gesture to the horrors of history embedded within

Wynema's moments of the unspeakable. These horrors often compel the repression of certain political and historical events, yet they manage to haunt and unsettle the text and its reception through veiled referents.

WYNEMA'S GOTHIC SILENCES

The critical history of Callahan's *Wynema* begins with the story of a "lost" text and its exhumation. Due to the sparse critical review paid to the novel upon its first publication and perhaps because of the author's untimely death in 1894 at the age of twenty-six, the novel became lost to the public eye for nearly a century.⁵ Briefly rediscovered in 1955 by Carolyn Thomas Foreman only to lie dormant for another forty years, the novel's flash appearances and concomitant suppression reflect a book history indicative of the systemic silences endured by marginalized writers encountering dominant literary tastes and cultural values that perhaps preferred their voicelessness. Once fully recovered, however, the reception of such texts may encounter further complications by contemporary scholars who struggle, in *Wynema*'s case, with the ostensibly assimilationist stance of the novel's politics and criticize its intellectual contribution.

The plot follows the relationship between *Wynema* and her southern white mentor, Genevieve Weir, who acts as the novel's protagonist. As the plot opens, the narrator takes the reader into a nostalgic, ethnographic, and tribally inaccurate historic moment in which *Wynema* lives happily among her family in teepees as a "child of the forest."⁶ When Genevieve, full of Christian zeal, accepts a post as schoolteacher among the unnamed tribe, *Wynema* immediately becomes the star pupil and, as she grows up, an assimilated lifetime friend who later, without difficulties in the midst of antimiscegenation laws, marries Genevieve's brother Robin.

Although this main plot seemingly adheres to the sentimental story lines of its day, *Wynema* deviates from the standard fare in several ways. First, the novel lies heavy with overt political commentary: the characters heatedly debate allotment, women's suffrage, and racial hierarchy. The themes of Christian indoctrination, assimilation, Indian education, interracial marriage and adoption, and Indian military resistance also feature significantly. Because of the number of political issues the novel raises, its growing body of criticism struggles to demarcate the

narrative's agenda and hesitates over the unspeakable, noticing but not fully explicating its significance.⁷ For example, Melissa Ryan uses a gothic language of tension and repression when she identifies the text's abundance of political issues as seeming to "coexist uneasily" (26). Beth Piatote points out the uneasiness of the novel's form and content, naming the form as a "hybrid text that is something more or different than sentimental fiction" (64). Her language here invokes the unspeakable as the "something more" than silence that comes with gothic fiction. While this awkward overabundance of political themes causes scholars to acknowledge the novel's aesthetic shortcomings, these should more importantly signal one to recognize this excess as suspect, the disarticulations of traumatic memory.

Second, the novel deviates from the typical sentimental plot by ending not with the culmination of marriage but with the massacre at Wounded Knee. Many scholars note the short time frame between the December 29, 1890, date of the massacre and the novel's publication in the spring of 1891 as significant: in her introduction A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff points out the "third section" as "such an abrupt departure from the earlier romance plot that it may well have been added to an almost-completed novel" (xxvi), Lisa Tatonetti estimates "only four to five months between the massacre and *Wynema's* debut" (7), and Jennifer Nader points to the publication of a letter, included in Callahan's text, as the means with which to pinpoint the late date of authorship (76). As a result, the novel draws much attention as one of the only literary and contemporary representations of this historic event, an attention that, like the plethora of political issues, may distract readers from the novel's significant silences.

For example, early in the novel a silent exchange between young Wynema and Genevieve illustrates their intimacy and mutual understanding, despite their race, age difference, and a dwindling language barrier. After some absence in which Wynema meets and develops a relationship with Genevieve, Wynema reunites with her former mentor, the tribal missionary Gerald Keithly. He soon notices the close friendship between the women and teases Wynema with the question, "Tell me now, do you love me too?" (Callahan 19). The female friendship performs its intimacy at this point in the conversation with a nonverbal communication: "Wynema glanced up at her teacher, her eyes questioning mischievously, 'Shall I?' to which silent interrogative Miss Weir

nodded assent" (19). Here both the text and the characters exhibit their consciousness of silence as a rhetorical tool, immediately enabling their subversive communication in the face of patriarchal assertion but more broadly creating a space for ostensibly taboo subjects, such as their interracial friendship.

Immediately after the above exchange, Gerald teases Wynema over her love for Genevieve and withholds the candy he brought her. Wynema responds to this teasing with silence and a bodily turning away, not in a childish petulance but in a hurt betrayal (Callahan 20). Her silence causes Gerald to regret his teasing, and he offers her the candy. Wynema then again silently communicates with Genevieve, "with tears in her eyes" (20), to which Genevieve responds by encouraging her to take it. Genevieve scolds Gerald, poignantly announcing, "You have robbed her gratitude of its sweetness; she thanks you only in words" (20). This minor drama and Genevieve's rebuke tell us that the novel's intention for silence comes from its context and that its meaning may turn on a dime. While their communicative silence demonstrates the level of deep intimacy established by Genevieve and Wynema in their relationship, Wynema also wields her silence as a helpless but stony disapproval toward the behavior of Gerald, who typically mentors her with love but in this case abused his position of authority over her. Genevieve ends this confrontation by explaining that feelings do not always match the words spoken, enlightening readers to the importance of the unspoken in the text. In this exchange, the novel begins to hint at the political work of silence in interrupting the abuse of power and bearing witness to its oppression.

As another example, multiple moments of silence occur between the lovers as they struggle to reveal and accept each other's feelings. Before Gerald finally declares his feelings for Genevieve, the narrative conveys Gerald's thoughts instead of his words to give insight into his feelings: "'Just as you are the queen among women,' thought Gerald, but he said: 'So you like it? I thought you would'" (Callahan 39). Here the text again delineates the difference between the prattle of words and the unspoken intensities of silence and highlights its own silence by using the word directly later in this scene in order to emphasize its conscious implementation: "She had seated herself in the window on the balcony, and he sat down beside her. They were silent for some time" (39). Although their feelings stay temporarily unspoken, the text makes evident that

the characters are acutely aware of them and the tensions they invoke. Likewise, the courtship between Wynema and Robin also possesses intimate moments of the unspoken when after a prolonged flirtation Robin gazes into Wynema's eyes with "deep meaning" (46), hinting at his love for her. Thus repeatedly in the novel's romances *Wynema* validates the importance of nonverbal communication for subversive expression. Just as Wynema can thank Gerald "only in words" and Gerald can think one thing and say another, so too the novel whispers of the critical implications that lie within its silences instead of its words.

Though yielding important rhetorical insight, these silences do not function as gothic. Instead, they demonstrate the difference, referring back to Adrienne Rich, between the unspoken and the unspeakable because they persistently remain conscious to the text and the characters. In these examples silence acts as an inability to articulate a desire. This struggle contains a certain degree of fear and uncertainty, but these do not come from historical trauma. Rather, these feelings remain at the individual level and often exist momentarily. Gothic silence, however, occurs at a societal level, much greater than a single individual, character, or author. It signals repressed feelings over a long-standing issue, such as slavery, miscegenation, or genocide, that permeates a society ubiquitously but whose social repercussions often remain buried in the national psyche. Such silences dictate speech and, like Wynema's gratitude, render it less meaningful than what lingers unsaid.

Once these silences garner critical attention, the narrative's time line becomes essential in determining its historical context and experience of colonization. Ruoff approximates the novel's time period as "the mid or late 1870s through 1890," the latter date fixed by the heavily fictionalized account of Wounded Knee and the former date inferred from "Wynema's probable age and events in the Muscogee Nation" ("Editor's Introduction" xxxiv, xxxiii). Judging from this time line, then, and from the way newspapers emphasize *Wynema's* focus on political events, the plot's trajectory encompasses not only the historical events the novel mentions but also the shadowed events within the same time frame that designate the unspeakable.

The narrative pairs every significant political event with a newspaper consultation—the per-capita payments of the Muscogee, allotment, and Wounded Knee. These are not passing references but extended quotes from multiple papers that feature centrally in the characters' debates.

This emphasis on the importance of print culture dovetails with Callahan's personal life. Due to the Callahan family's frequent appearances in newspapers, Ruoff relies heavily on print culture, specifically local and tribal newspapers, to sketch the family biography of *Wynema's* author. She reports that Callahan's father, Samuel Benton Callahan, edited two newspapers in his lifetime and, as a member of what Ruoff describes as the Muscogee aristocracy, often appeared in print ("Editor's Introduction" xiv–xv). Callahan followed in her father's footsteps in this regard, frequently appearing in print for the same reasons and also managing to edit a Methodist journal, *Our Brother in Red*, during the same year in which she completed and published *Wynema* (xvi). Callahan's legacy of print culture, then, gave her the tools with which to highlight the political issues her novel seeks to engage and simultaneously gestures toward the political issues about which her novel maintains a gothic silence.

When engaging in extended conversations directly relevant to Indigenous politics, characters of *Wynema* draw conspicuously upon newspapers for the first time with a discussion of the per-capita payments. *Wynema's* father, Choe Harjo, consults with Gerald and Genevieve in regard to the per-capita payment scandal currently in the news in which Muscogee delegates misappropriated tribal funds at the expense of the tribal populace. After a brief summary by Gerald of the thievery, all the characters fall momentarily silent. The gravity of the issue and their helplessness to rectify it cause this silence, adding another instance of the unspeakable in the face of a power imbalance and struggle seen earlier on a more minute scale between *Wynema* and Gerald. Breaking their silence, Choe's first words relate the anger his people expressed over this injustice at a recent meeting and tells his friends that he fears "trouble and bloodshed" as a result (Callahan 31).

While the novel utilizes this incident to expose the various ways in which Indigenous people have been cheated, the novel oddly does not mention the civil unrest happening among the Muscogee during this same period. Known as the Green Peach War, this internal conflict lasted from 1879 to 1881 and occurred when a "disaffected group supported a rival [Muscogee] government" (Ruoff, "Editor's Introduction" xxxiii). This event marks a milestone in Muscogee history, and yet as Ruoff points out without speculation, "Callahan does not allude to the factionalism that divided Muscogees during and after the Civil War or to this rebellion" (xxxiii) in spite of its importance within Callahan's short

life and the novel's corresponding time line. Only the discussion of the per-capita payment treachery musters any reference to what the novel calls the "trouble and bloodshed" of the period, screening its repression of the even more traumatic Muscogee civil war.

The textual gap that occurs between chapters 5 and 6 also represses this event. Its missing years most likely match and elide this civil fractioning and unrest, an omission alluded to only by the strange lack of description of Gerald's thoughts. Just after relating the feelings of other characters and setting up a last description of Gerald's romantic sentiments, the narrative stops short, instead substituting a poetic insert that ends with "Deeply buried from human eyes!" while the next chapter begins with the title, "An Indian Burial" (Callahan 22–23). This is also the point at which Wynema loses her dialect and begins reading Shakespeare, Dickens, and Scott, all signs of her assimilation. While there may be many possible reasons for the text's omission of this significant tribal event, certainly the rebellion caused a traumatic upheaval among invested observers and participants. It may also have exposed a political weakness of the Muscogee Nation to America at an especially inopportune time as the military returned its attentions to the Indian wars after the conclusion of the Civil War. As a whole, however, this omission not only evinces Callahan's reluctance to mention the historical conflicts of her teenage years and support Indigenous armed resistance but also signals an early example of the Indigenous gothic that the novel's unspeakable reveals to be "buried" within the text.

The direct use of newspapers for a political discussion occurs again when the characters debate allotment. *Wynema* demands an attention to the role of print culture in the novel most emphatically when Genevieve argues against allotment by citing newspaper after newspaper. She directly quotes from two, using her rhetorical skill to provide reputable evidence for her argument.⁸ One of these quotes comes from a "Gen. Noble, Secretary of the Interior," whose recommendation to Congress "strikes a blow at 'Wild West' shows" in addition to promoting allotment (Callahan 51). Because the highlighted main event of Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West shows at this time was invariably Custer's "last stand" (Slotkin 301), this carefully chosen quote circulating in print culture subtly pairs the novel's heavy-handed emphasis on allotment with its silence over an arguably even more important event in Native American history: the Battle of the Little Bighorn.⁹ In eastern Montana territory on June 25,

1876, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and the U.S. Seventh Cavalry ambushed an uncharacteristically large summer encampment of Lakota people and their allies, estimated at ten thousand people, at the Little Bighorn river (Brown 290). As they attacked, the tribal military of approximately four thousand quickly rallied, and combat ensued.¹⁰ By the next day, Custer and nearly all of his command of several hundred soldiers lay dead.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn functions as *Wynema's* unspeakable in several ways. In line with Toni Morrison's definition, the battle becomes unspeakable because of the systemic silences erasing Native historical and literary perspectives of the event until their very recent recovery and inclusion. The battle also functions as the unspeakable because it veils a widespread historical trauma: as a result of the victory, the U.S. military and some portions of the civilian population desired revenge in the form of violent retaliation against the Lakota in particular but against all Indians generally. In addition, the iconic creation of Custer by the popular press in the aftermath of the battle permanently vilified Indigenous peoples as savages in the popular imagination, an impression so indelible that strands of it continue to this day within the mythos of the American West. The novel's conspicuous silence in regard to the battle in spite of its corresponding time line shrouds the trepidation of an impending violence and the fear of its manifestation in the massacre of Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890, during which members of the replenished Seventh Cavalry slaughtered approximately three hundred Lakota men, women, and children while forcing them to try to outrun their embanked Hotchkiss guns and other weapons. These horrific facts reiterate precisely why historical events often find appropriate expression only through the poignant silences of the gothic within marginalized literatures.

Systemic silences existed until recently in regard to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, as the dominant narrative excluded Native firsthand accounts and perspectives of the battle within the scholarship. For nearly a century historians often told a myopic story "almost exclusively through the eyes of the soldiers" (Buchholtz 114) and often discredited or discounted Native witnesses and historians. For example, in his groundbreaking work with Paul Stekler in *Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (1994), Blackfeet and Gros Ventre author James Welch relates that the inclusion of Native

testimony to historical records of the battle is “new” and recounts the experience of a seventeen-year-old Crow scout named Curley (21).¹¹ Welch explains that Curley’s account of the battle “met with ridicule from the beginning,” in spite of several immediate interviews, after which he was “branded a liar and publicity-seeker” (21). Only now, Welch writes, do historians believe his story to be accurate (21). Lest we think Curley’s example represents an outlier, Lakota historian Joseph M. Marshall III summarizes, “In fact, the victors of the Little Bighorn have had scant opportunity to tell their story, and many of their individual versions of the battle have been clouded and reshaped by western interpretations, well-meaning or not” (17). Other Native witnesses of the event or descendants of those witnesses have expressed reluctance to speak of the battle. Paul Reddin records Sitting Bull’s abhorrence for discussing the battle and notes that he “often refused to speak of it at all” (80). In addition, in the epilogue of his book, Welch relates, “In talking with several Indian people, especially Lakotas and Cheyennes, I was surprised to learn that the Battle of the Little Bighorn was not the major event in their tribal memory that one might assume” (285). They preferred to speak of other conflicts and historical events, a preference that Welch strangely chalks up to the “sheer weight of loss” and defeat (285), even though the battle was ostensibly a victory. The past few decades of scholarly and literary inclusion work to effectively revise these systemic silences, attempting to expose the past century of this Indigenous unspeakable.

The battle also acts as the unspeakable because of the trauma its depiction in print cultures inflicted upon Native peoples. The newspaper coverage of this event constitutes the largest print culture vilification in Native American history. Unquestionably a military victory for the Lakota and their allies, the battle instigated an outraged frenzy of media attention, further enflamed by the timing of the breaking news with the American centennial. James Mueller compares the media coverage of the battle to that of “events like the sinking of the *Titanic*, the attack on Pearl Harbor, or the 9-11 terrorist attacks” (86–87), stories that dominated the news cycle and became milestones in American history. Robert Utley devotes an entire chapter of his book to the role the press played in Custer’s legend, describing it as the “biggest news break of the year,” as the newspapers “eagerly devoted column after column to reports arriving from the frontier” (38). The predominance of newspapers throughout

Wynema replicates this media frenzy, even though it replaces any direct reference to the battle with other historical events as if to displace the distress of such news coverage onto less disturbing topics.

Although the political positions of these newspapers varied following the battle, most of them flamed the fury of public sentiment and called for violent retaliation. John Coward documents some of these reactions, many of which, published soon after news of the battle broke, called for the complete and merciless extermination of “hostile” tribes, with headlines such as “Extermination of Indians the Only Remedy” and “Indians Must Be Destroyed” (“Indian Wars” 181, 205). Such headlines display the horror of colonialism in that even a military victory, recovering from a surprise attack on an encampment of families, could be so one-sidedly mischaracterized and, simultaneously, used as a justification for continuing violent retaliation.

Print cultures served only to increase the battle’s notoriety and Indian vilification in the decades to follow. Although the battle amounted to a minor confrontation in comparison to the recent battles of the Civil War, Coward writes that the media reports turned it into “a powerful symbol of America’s manifest destiny” (“Explaining” 540). He adds, “With the help of the newspapers, the illustrated press, and dime novels, the Battle of the Little Bighorn was soon transformed into Custer’s Last Stand, a name which recognized not only the fate of Custer and his command but also marked the closing days of the Indian frontier” (540). This decisive victory meant little in the war against colonization, as the results of the conflict “enraged not just the army but the American public” (Buchholtz 87) and brought with it the fear of retribution and political alienation from those sympathetic to Native American people, making Indigenous survivance even more vulnerable at the turn of the century.

With the battle’s legend only growing in mythic proportions within print cultures, those who attempted to voice their viewpoints at the time directly confronted the oppression of colonization. Coward’s research on two tribal newspapers, the *Cherokee Advocate* and the *Indian Journal* (Muscogee), verifies the struggle tribal leaders had in expressing their perspectives in the face of the nation’s outrage. He writes that the battle’s victory “put native editors in a precarious position. If they cheered too loudly for the Indian victors, they would risk the goodwill of many whites. If they condemned the Indian victory, they would risk the sup-

port of their Indian readers” (“Explaining” 540). Native editors’ constraint, he claims, speaks to the extreme strain on Indian-white relations after the battle and their losing fight against the “howls of racism” in the midst of the “ideology of race and progress” in the era (545, 540). Even though the most vehement statements centered on the Sioux (Lakota), the victory of the battle threatened the lives of Indigenous people everywhere, as the public eye often did not distinguish between tribes. These examples perhaps account for Callahan’s struggle in representing the battle, as she grappled with the same constraints of praise and condemnation as these Native editors and instead buries the battle as an unspeakable trauma in her novel.

Callahan would have been eight years old at the time of the Battle of the Little Bighorn and twenty-two at the time of Wounded Knee. Because she died tragically young at the age of twenty-six, nearly her entire life spanned these two seminal events in Native American history. As the daughter of a newspaper editor and later an editor herself in an aristocratic family who stayed informed politically, Callahan surely knew about the battle. Ruoff affirms Callahan’s involvement in the era’s contemporary issues when she discloses, “As acculturated, well-read, and independent daughters of Indian fathers who were actively involved in tribal affairs, both Callahan and Johnson were well aware of the injustices under the law endured by both Indians and women” (“Justice” 249). Clearly, the battle would have deeply impacted anyone alive at the time of its occurrence, especially Indigenous peoples in positions of influence like Callahan and her family. As a result, this critical omission in the text can be excused neither by a lack of information or by the author’s political disengagement. Indeed, Callahan’s early years would have been flooded with publicity regarding the battle and its living legend in dime novels and Wild West shows, and she wrote her debut novel in such a way as to highlight the role of the press in Indigenous politics, as this article has already argued.

Although the quote by General Noble and his reference to the Wild West shows alongside his comment on allotment remain the closest allusions the text makes to the battle, early moments of silence in the text correspond with the historical timing of the event. According to Ruoff’s undisputed time frame, the novel’s opening scenes omit mention of the battle and its frenzied aftermath in the national news. Although the character of Wynema would have been young, Callahan certainly portrays

her as being curious and actively engaged in the world around her, which would have been inundated with news of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. This timing means that Genevieve arrives at the reservation during or soon after the battle hit the national press and flooded popular culture, and she and the other adults certainly would not have been able to avoid the news. The battle's omission, then, silently structures the nature of Indigenous and white relations from the very beginning of the novel, not only in the opening scenes of *Wynema* but also in its paratextual dedication to Native Americans who "have *felt* the wrongs and oppression of their pale-faced brothers" but, by implication, cannot always *speak* outright against those wrongs (Callahan n.p., emphasis mine).¹²

Yet the narrative's elision of a major event in Indian history speaks volumes of the silent horror of the political climate, especially as the novel begins in the era of the battle and ends the plot with the tragedy of Wounded Knee. Not only did the battle inflict trauma on Native peoples in terms of their extreme vilification in the press and other print cultures, but it also created the trauma of trepidation in regard to the genocidal violence threatened as a result. From a Lakota perspective, Marshall affirms the trauma inflicted by the battle, in spite of its decisive victory. Leaving no room for doubt, he titles his 2007 book of Lakota history *The Day the World Ended at Little Bighorn*, exhibiting his belief in the battle as a catastrophic encounter. He further characterizes it as a cultural breaking point into a new way of life, creating "uneasiness" in the elders of the tribe who questioned what kind of retaliation this victory might bring and ultimately "caus[ing] the victors to walk an exceedingly difficult road *from* the Little Bighorn" (15, 23).

Without doubt, the road from the Little Bighorn was fraught with retaliation, a form of which happened at Wounded Knee.¹³ The military pursued persecution, as they certainly did before this event but increasingly afterward, contributing to the climate surrounding the Ghost Dance panics and Wounded Knee. After the victory of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the U.S. military response did not hesitate, and "within just a few weeks the army fielded the largest troop deployment since the Civil War to track [the victors] down" (Buchholtz 1). Only months before *Wynema*'s publication, the Wounded Knee massacre occurred at the hands of the reconstituted Seventh Cavalry, a unit that Michelle Ann Abate assumes felt "lingering personal resentment and possibly even the longstanding desire for revenge [that] may have dictated their actions"

(116). Abate further notes, “Indeed, as Mark St. Pierre has written, when the fighting at Wounded Knee Creek was finally over, some of the U.S. soldiers reportedly shouted ‘Remember Custer!’” (127). The United States, also clearly eager to remember a fallen hero, awarded twenty-three of these cavalymen the Congressional Medal of Honor for their actions in the Wounded Knee massacre and what some call their success in Custer’s revenge (Buchholtz 100).¹⁴ Although this massacre marks neither the first nor the last genocidal act of the U.S. government, it constitutes an exceptionally egregious act of violence during a particularly vulnerable time in Native history. Awarding Medals of Honor to soldiers who used Hotchkiss guns on several hundred Native Americans attempting to run to safety represents not only horror but the unspeakable fear of retaliation threatened as a result of the Little Bighorn.

While the novel’s opening chapters repress the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the second time gap in the novel bridges this former omission to the tragedy at Wounded Knee. Beginning with chapter 18, the point at which Ruoff identifies a “third section” possibly tacked onto an already complete novel (“Editor’s Introduction” xxvi), the narrative restarts with a growing concern from the characters over the Ghost Dance, which contributed to the tensions prefacing the massacre. The chapter opens with foreboding, anticipated by the title, “Turmoil with the Indians,” and Gerald’s opening statement, which ends with “I hope there will be no trouble” (Callahan 71).¹⁵ This anxiety indicates the residual fear of retaliation from the battle and connects to the earlier omissions that maintain a gothic silence in regard to the repressed memory of other military conflicts. Moreover, the opening third of the novel takes a more strongly worded political stance in favor of Indigenous peoples than in previous assimilationist moments, claiming they do not fight “without abundant cause” and even then only for “what the white people have taken from them” (71, 72). The characters again rely on newspapers as key evidence in their discussion, citing a slew of reports and editorials first in order to document the motivation for the trouble—starvation at the hands of the U.S. government—and then to describe the Ghost Dance (72–73). The narrative does not hesitate to include an editor’s racist remarks regarding “the dancing Indians” and his call for their extermination (73) but tempers them with an equally vehement Muscogee response. These articles mirror the earlier headlines John Coward attests to as surrounding the Battle of the Little Bighorn, but

the novel deflects those sentiments to the context of the Ghost Dance instead as evidence of their connection in the national consciousness.

The next chapter introduces a new character: the “dark” Wildfire, a Lakota warrior whom Gerald’s friend Carl Peterson tries to convince not to fight the U.S. government (Callahan 80). In response, Wildfire tells him of the recent murder of Few Tails and his men, whose “stiff bodies lying where they fell, told a story, a story far more eloquent and impressive than human lips could have uttered” (81–82). Wildfire ends his speech by saying, “Peace is not the watchword of the oppressed” (82). Even though Wildfire speaks for those bodies, claiming in short that they tell him to fight, his preface negates his own appropriation of their words and emphasizes their story’s ultimate unspeakability. This scene belies the communication of cultural history, especially when confronted with the sheer horror of genocide, but it simultaneously records the importance of such cultural memory for the living and their political actions.

Throughout this third section *Wynema* grossly misrepresents Wounded Knee as a battle, fictionalizing the event until it is almost unrecognizable. Just the date, the only one given in the course of the novel, clearly identifies it: December 29 (Callahan 101). The novel appears to conflate the story of the massacre with that of the Battle of the Little Bighorn in order to cement their close relationship. First, the novel meticulously describes Wildfire’s plan of attack, while both the battle and Wounded Knee came as a surprise. The language, however, that Wildfire maneuvers to describe his plan of attack sounds remarkably like the dime novel recaps of the battle. He explains to his wife that they will deceive the enemy by appearing to have fewer numbers at first, and then the full force of his men will “rush up from all sides, with a mighty whoop, and surround them” (88–89). Although the narrative portrays Wildfire as a grown man with a family and, moreover, as a military leader, his words here seem juvenile and reflective of the language in popular culture used to describe Custer’s Last Stand. Furthermore, once the two sides clash on the battlefield, the narrative romanticizes Wildfire’s violence by recreating it as his “last stand,” knowing the battle to be lost but shouting, “We shall die, then!” (90).

The novel betrays its own awareness of these inaccuracies, however, as it later unsuccessfully attempts to correct its mistake by mentioning Wildfire’s participation in two different conflicts (Callahan 101–02). As

Gerald, Robin, and Genevieve reflect upon the tragedy of Wounded Knee, one of the men gives the aforementioned December 29 date and describes the massacre with more accuracy than it did previously, again consulting newspaper accounts (100–01). However, the narrative now claims that Wildfire escaped from Wounded Knee only to “engage in a fiercer conflict,” which refers to the battle in which Wildfire dies (102). Here the confusion of facts may represent the hasty inclusion of the novel’s last third, as well as the newspaper inaccuracies of Wounded Knee circulating immediately after its occurrence, but it also equates the trauma of both military victories and massacres under the overwhelming tidal wave of colonialism. The narrative strains to communicate this devastation but manages only to dissemble the emotional fallout through historical substitutions, grasping for gothic silences as the most fitting means of transmitting the unspeakable.

BEARING WITNESS

Before the conclusion of *Wynema* settles into its reiteration of the ubiquitous Vanishing Indian trope, the penultimate chapter of the novel includes a warning from Carl Peterson to the United States regarding the “terrible retribution in store” for its future as a result of its treatment of Indigenous peoples (Callahan 102). The chapter’s threats evoke the biblical book of Revelation, prophesying “wars and pestilence, anarchies and open rebellions” set in motion by a Christian God’s revenge for America’s actions (102). This chapter and other instances in the text complicate the novel’s political stance, sometimes dismissively labeled as assimilationist. However, an attention to the novel’s invocation of the Indigenous unspeakable gestures toward the horror experienced during this era and thus preserves a certain kind of cultural memory through these pronounced silences, recording the carnages experienced by Indigenous peoples through colonialism and pointing to the ones that cannot be expressed directly. Even though the trope of the Vanishing Indian receives the last word of the novel, the text has already avowed that it bows in the face of oppression “only in words,” utilizing silence as a way to subvert power structures.

Thus not only does *Wynema* resist the systemic silencing of Indigenous generic expression during the nineteenth century, its gothic silences recover the “poorly documented, partially erased cultural

history" (2) to which Brogan refers. The value of the unspeakable to the Indigenous gothic lies within this ability to preserve alternative histories, documenting the atrocities experienced within the genocidal acts of colonialism and repressed within the national consciousness. This preservation provides a better understanding of the fears faced by those living through the social violence of the late nineteenth century and pushes against official historical narratives in order to share those experiences too appalling for words. Confronting a series of cultural, linguistic, and generational breaks, the unspeakable strives for communicative continuity, even if only to testify to the harm of these breaks. Yet, rather than seeing historical trauma as a festering wound, the recovery of the unspeakable provides a knowledge of the past that contextualizes our contemporary moment. Like Wynema's newspapers, the unspeakable of historical trauma also supplies evidence to support our political discussions, and it models a means of preserving the contemporary unspeakable, which, as the text demonstrates, always comes from unreconciled experiences of the past. Language cannot fully render these experiences, but the gothic silences of *Wynema* indicate their horror and in doing so measure the strength of Indigenous survival.

To "bear" witness is to struggle under a burden, to be accountable to history, and to attempt to speak publicly of one's experience. To do so is a struggle and a burden because to put words to horror in a way that does justice to the event can often prove to be impossible. In relation to genocides like the Holocaust, for example, D. Jan Mennell points out the complex and potentially negative aspects of silence, which may express "the speechless agony of the survivor who cannot find a way to articulate the experience because there is no language capable of expressing the horrendous events and the guilt of being alive" (491). Although Mennell and others point to the Holocaust as a cataclysmic event that added a new dimension to silence, I would point to other genocides as acting in a similar way for different groups, including Indigenous peoples. Paul Chaat Smith, for example, reflected on the importance of the unspoken in relation to colonial violence for the National Museum of the American Indian, which he said "should be as much about what we do not or cannot know, and about how we know what we know, as about a known history of colonial violence" (qtd. in Cohen 30). Attention to the expression of the Indigenous unspeakable impacts not only the way we read nineteenth-century Indigenous literature and some of the

earliest writings by Indigenous women but also potentially the way in which we read and analyze Indigenous literature broadly. Ultimately, Callahan's novice engagement with the novel enacts a profound politics of testimony, reflection, and meaningful silence that leaves an important legacy for Indigenous female writers, for Muscogee literature, and for the canon of Indigenous literature.

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NOTES

1. Although silence as it relates to the unspeakable remains the focus of this essay, productive recent scholarship exists on the rhetorics of silence in relation to Indigenous literature. See especially Cheryl Glenn's chapter in *Unspoken*, "Commanding Silence," in which she discusses Indigenous silence; Elizabeth Wilkinson's article on Gertrude Bonnin's strategies of rhetorical silence; Pamela Rader's article on the "productive silences" in Louise Erdrich's *The Painted Drum*; and David Moore's discussion of sacred silence in Indigenous literature.

2. Even though numerous references imply that the novel's characters are Muscogee, the novel never names the characters' tribal affiliation explicitly. The first chapter simply calls them "Tepee Indians," causing Susan Bernardin, among others, to point out Callahan's novel as "less a 'Creek' text than a putatively pan-tribal one: a text generalized enough to encompass a range of Native struggles while formulaic enough to appeal to non-Native readers' expectations" (212). For scholarly discussions on the novel's genre as sentimental, see especially Windell; Bernardin.

3. The precedence for this theoretical move comes from several sources. In the foreword to *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature*, Nicolas Jose stakes this claim: "Aboriginal literature has its own traditions, modes, and rhetoric, and it is almost always charged with political commitment. It asks to be respected and valued on its own terms. . . . It therefore calls for different kinds of response and engagement, with the recognition that it is a distinct and separate expression of the Indigenous cultural world. At the same time, it connects with and even permeates the

wider Australian current in so many ways that it needs to be interpreted in that larger context too: as dialogue, incursion, counterpoint" (viii). Citing a number of Native American scholars upon which he draws, Jace Weaver in *That the People Might Live* argues that "we must drink from our own wells" of Native criticism and scholarship even while we "set our scholarly work and our literatures in the stream of history to which they belong" (xii).

4. This emphasis on the unspeakable resonates across canonical gothic traditions as well. Broadly theorizing both fiction and film, Judith Halberstam defines the gothic as "the crisis occasioned by the inability to 'tell,' meaning both the inability to narrate and the inability to categorize" (23). Her words reflect the systemic silences referred to earlier that surround and occupy marginalized literature, as "language performs the operations of the uncanny so that the unspeakable is buried alive within the speakable, one story lies buried in another, one history produces and buries others" (35). In addition, in response to critics of using "Western" psychology in Indigenous contexts, Julia Emberley in *The Testimonial Uncanny* challenges the categorization of the uncanny as Western scientific knowledge, claiming that such a label "misrecognize[s]" its existence across other epistemologies (22). Although each national or ethnic corpus of gothic literatures these theorists address contains its own traditions, all of them rest foundationally on the unspeakable.

5. For an excellent history of the text and for more biographical information regarding the author, see Ruoff's "Editor's Introduction."

6. Womack's *Red on Red* most thoroughly delineates the text's historical inaccuracies.

7. Within that search, nearly all of the text's critics find themselves using the language of the gothic, albeit perhaps unconsciously. Both Piatote (89) and Ruoff ("Justice" 251) also point out the novel's "ruptures" in tone and plot. Finally, two other scholars spend a brief amount of time with its silences. Tatonetti's "Behind the Shadows of Wounded Knee" questions the disembodiment of Lakota women in the novel, and Bernardin's "On the Meeting Grounds of Sentiment" astutely examines the absence of African Americans in the novel, offering a unique reading of the author's dedication in that regard.

8. Print culture surfaces again as integral in the characters' lives when Genevieve asks her suitor, Maurice Mauran, to read a paper on the subject of allotment. When Maurice speaks derogatorily of both the paper and its apparently antiallotment argument, in addition to Genevieve's ability to hold political opinions, she breaks off their relationship. Her vehement response stuns Maurice not only into silence but into a bodily lack of strength as well, "hardly able to conduct himself to the door" (Callahan 56). His surprise into silence comes as a motivation different from what has previously been seen in the text: a power upset of the one presuming to be in power.

9. The Lakota term this the Battle of Greasy Grass or Greasy Grass Creek. I employ the American name because of my discussion of its popular perception in the American imagination.

10. These estimates, of course, vary. John Coward, for example, numbers the encampment at about seven thousand, with a military force of approximately two

thousand ("Indian Wars" 160). Most elements of the battle have come under intense scrutiny and debate in the past 150 years because of the American popular imagination's fascination with the event, producing an enormous body of publications. My research relies primarily on those accounts produced within the field of Native American scholarship.

11. Several Crow scouts aided Custer in finding the Lakota encampment.
12. See Beth A. McCoy's "Race and the (Para)Textual Condition" for its important attention to the "epigraphs, dedications, prefaces, and other bookish elements" in the novels of racially marked authors.
13. However, to observe that retaliation occurred is not the equivalent of claiming its inevitability. As Lisa Tatonetti warns in a footnote, the "myth of inevitability" surrounds Wounded Knee in terms of "cause (the Ghost Dance) and effect (Wounded Knee)" as one of numerous tools used to justify genocide (28). Taking her lead, the Battle of the Little Bighorn and any genocidal violence like Wounded Knee should not be construed as an inevitable cause-and-effect relationship; nevertheless, these events are in correlation and provide just cause for anxiety and repression.
14. Numerous individuals and groups have made appeals and petitions to the U.S. government to rescind these medals. As of yet, none of these appeals have been successful. See Moya-Smith for a recent article on the movement.
15. Within this opening chapter the narrative slips in a meaningful allusion to another gothic text as Carl Peterson declares his intent to go help his people, the Sioux, during a time in which "enough is the matter to rouse the most Rip-Van-Winkle-like sleeper" (Callahan 74). Charles Crow includes Washington Irving's short story "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) in his *American Gothic* anthology, and contemporary scholars interpret the story as containing "between-the-lines history" that expresses a veiled ambivalence and critique over yet another historical event: the American Revolution (Blakemore 201). See also Wyman; Pollard.

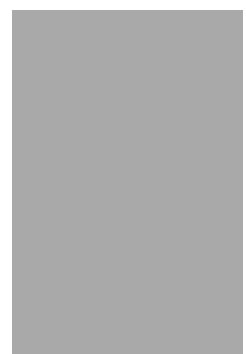
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Maria Tallchief, (Native) *America's Prima Ballerina*

Autobiographies of a Postindian Princess

SHANNON TOLL

All the girls showed an aptitude for dancing, and all were charming and well behaved. I, however, seemed to develop a special rapport with Caroline [Kennedy]. She was only eight, but she was fascinated by my background. That I was part American Indian enthralled her. One afternoon, while we were changing into street clothing after class, she stood alongside me and said in a whisper that she had a question. Her eyes were bright and she seemed all excited.

“I want to know what it's like being an Indian.”

“Well Caroline. It's no different from being anything else. It's my heritage and I'm proud of it. You're Irish and French and American. That's your heritage. You should be proud of that.”

She peered at me directly with her father's shining eyes. “I'd rather be an American Indian, Miss Tallchief.”

Maria Tallchief with Larry Kaplan,

Maria Tallchief: America's Prima Ballerina

In this passage from her autobiography, *Maria Tallchief: America's Prima Ballerina*, Tallchief shares with her reader a moment between herself and little Caroline Kennedy, a beloved pupil of Tallchief's during the latter's time as a ballet teacher. While Tallchief had retired from her post as principal dancer on the world's most illustrious stages, this conversation between prima ballerina and American “princess” illustrates Tallchief's multifaceted allure as a celebrated dancer and a woman of Osage descent. While she expresses “pride” in her heritage in the passage, it was also a complicating factor in her relationship to her public, as audiences shared little Caroline Kennedy's almost possessive fascination with her

Native identity, a fascination that caused her performances to be filtered through a lens of colonial anxiety and subsequent exoticization.

I have chosen this passages from her autobiography to illustrate how Tallchief encountered her publics as a writer, as America's first prima ballerina, and as an Osage woman. In her autobiography, Tallchief narrates her mastery of Western dance, her ascent to the status of prima ballerina, her pivotal role in establishing an American ballet tradition, and, throughout, her connection to her Osage heritage, and in doing so she establishes her identity as a "postindian princess."

While the Indian Princess identity looms large in American consciousness, Tallchief both embodied and complicated this trope in her career, eluding colonial definitions of idealized Indigenous femininity. Beginning with the myth of Pocahontas as John Smith's adoring savior, the Indian Princess is the figurehead for the "legacy of painless 'history' in the early stages of European settlement in North America," constantly reenvisioned in various genres but always playing the same part: that of the conduit for "civilization" in the New World (Lyytinen 83). Moreover, casting Native American women as "princesses" also denies them meaningful agency within discourses of power, rendering them passive and submissive in the public consciousness. This article addresses this passivity ascribed to Indigenous women and describes how a woman such as Tallchief, who ostensibly embodied the Indian Princess prima ballerina—particularly through her tutelage and marriage to acclaimed choreographer George Balanchine—was able to exert agency in an unexpected place.

Revealing the ways in which she was initially influenced by public perception of her as a Native American dancer and leading to her later identification with her Osage title, "Princess Two Standards," Tallchief's autobiography provides insight into the construction of her public persona as America's first prima ballerina and "postindian princess." The term "postindian princess" constitutes an intersection between two of Gerald Vizenor's foundational concepts: "manifest manners" and the "postindian." Vizenor writes that "manifest manners are the simulations of dominance; the notions and misnomers that are read as authentic and sustained as representations of Native American Indians." They are the "once bankable simulations of the savage as an impediment to developmental civilization, the simulations that audiences would consume in

Western literature and motion pictures, [which] protracted the extermination of tribal cultures” (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 5). This definition accounts for the “Indian Princess” aspect of Tallchief’s representation, as her status as a Native woman who had mastered a Western cultural performance reminded audiences of the Indian Princesses of Western myth, beginning with the “Mother of Us All,” Pocahontas. Rayna Green, author of “The Pocahontas Perplex,” posits the Indian Princess as a “model for a national understanding of Indian women” who “intrudes on the national consciousness, and . . . waits to be resurrected when our anxieties about who are we make us recall her from her woodland retreat” (700–01).¹ Thus, the Indian Princess is the feminine “good Indian”: helpful, submissive, and amenable to the “civilizing” force of settler colonialism. Tallchief ostensibly embodies the latter definition, that of a “whitewashed” Native woman who molds herself to fit Western paradigms of behavior.

However, Tallchief’s autobiographical practices (both written and performed, as I will demonstrate) complicate the very trope she appeared to personify in her public appearances. Instead, Tallchief is a “postindian warrior” who engages in “postindian narrative recreation” that “overcome[s] the manifest manners of dominance,” both onstage and later, on the page (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 5). Tallchief achieved prima ballerina status during a time when no American dancer, Native or non-Native, had done so, and in the process she contradicted social expectations of Native people as tragic victims who were incapable of adapting to, let alone *shaping*, modernity. In this article, I examine Tallchief’s autobiography, *America’s Prima Ballerina*, through this analytical lens, casting Tallchief as an influential contributor to Western dance, rather than an assimilated Indian Princess. Some critics perceive Tallchief as a cultural convert who subverted her Indigenous identity in order to conform to the standards of ballet and, by extension, Western culture itself; instead, Tallchief was an active agent not only in her career as a dancer but in her construction of her image for public audiences (balletic and literary alike) as a “postindian princess.” First, through examining her autobiography, we see Tallchief’s journey as an “Indian in an unexpected place” whose childhood experiences pushed her to identify and reject the “bankable simulations” of romanticized indigeneity that appealed to Western audiences and instead pursue and achieve greatness on a Western stage. Second, through comparisons

with the experience of African American contemporaries of Tallchief, I will discuss how Tallchief enacted onstage “territorial re-insurgence” by partnering with acclaimed choreographer George Balanchine to establish a ballet tradition in the United States, effectively reasserting an Indigenous aesthetic and active presence in a settler colonial space. For these reasons, Tallchief’s autobiography is more than a narrative of her career; it is a postindian princess counternarrative, one that details how Tallchief navigated her Western audiences’ expectations as a Native woman while rejecting their desire for “authentic” indigeneity.

Tallchief’s postindian princess counternarratives take the form of two autobiographical inscriptions: first, the written account she completed with Larry Kaplan, in which she describes her formative early dance experiences from childhood, through her ascension to the status of prima ballerina, and then her later life as a public and private figure; and second, her public dance performances, which embody both problematic pan-Indianism and autobiographical postindian “narrative recreations,” the “simulations that overcome the manifest manners of dominance” (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 5). In the rodeo dances of her youth, Tallchief remembers being made a “gimmick” in the eyes of her primarily white audience, experiencing the “double-consciousness” of their expectations conflicting with her own identity, while her later performances as a prima ballerina posited Tallchief’s dynamic body as a refutation of Western expectations of Native people existing as historical relics. Rather than offering audiences the “simulations of the tragic primitive” (vii) that they were used to seeing in film and photographs, Tallchief was an active, dominating presence who dazzled skeptical attendees with her mastery of balletic performance. In this way, Tallchief became an Indian in an “unexpected place,” articulating multiple inscriptions of “complex lineaments of personal and cultural identity that can never be captured by dichotomies built around crude notions of difference and assimilation, white and Indian, primitive and advanced” (Deloria, *Indians* 14). Through this dual approach to autobiography, I will demonstrate how a well-known Native American woman not only exerted authority over her own public persona but also moved beyond reacting to dominant expectations of indigeneity to becoming Princess Two Standards, a postindian prima ballerina.

While the name Two Standards for Tallchief’s identity, referring to being both a woman of Osage descent and a prima ballerina, was

meant to be celebratory, it also indicated the challenges she faced as an Indigenous woman in a non-Indigenous art form (Tallchief 183). In her early experiences as a dancer, Tallchief was made painfully aware of the racialized lens through which she was viewed, an experience shared by other dancers of color during this era. Critics who have discussed the experiences of African American ballerinas in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have effectively applied W. E. B. Du Bois's "double-consciousness" as a means of articulating "the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" that these dancers described (5). Nyama McCarthy-Brown explains that African American ballerinas have to contend with "double-consciousness when they enter the world of ballet, grounded in European culture with a Eurocentric ideology and try to maintain their identity within the African-American community, which promotes an African-American sense of pride that uplifts the African-American community" (389). While there are important distinctions between the historical and cultural experiences of African American and Indigenous Americans, as dancers, both groups encountered the Eurocentric gaze, which intensified the dancers' assumed responsibility of representing their respective communities.²

For Tallchief, "double-consciousness" was intricately tied to her positionality not only as a dancer of color but also as an Indigenous American dancer, a repository for colonial anxieties and, in the case of the Indian Princess, relief from those anxieties. In a recent special issue of *Dance Research Journal* focusing on Indigenous dance, Julie Burelle explains that the academy and other settler colonial institutions of power have "a long history of objectifying Indigenous bodies and practices, of misinterpreting or appropriating them, or of simply refusing to read Indigenous practices as embodiments and manifestations of epistemological frameworks on their own complex terms" (Mitchell and Burelle 41). While Tallchief was a ballerina and not a performer of Indigenous dance, her early experiences of performing *ostensibly* Indigenous dance, completely devoid of any Osage cultural importance, made her acutely aware of being objectified and reduced to signifiers of racial Otherness, something she strove to avoid in the rest of her career.

Maria was named Elizabeth Maria Tall Chief (she later changed her name to Tallchief) by her Osage father, Alexander Joseph Tall Chief Jr., and her Scots-Irish mother, Ruth Porter. Her family held a prominent

status within their community. In her written autobiography, Tallchief recounts that when her father was young, oil was discovered on Osage land, and in a short time the wealth of the tribe (and her family) had increased exponentially.³ Her family lived comfortably and was well respected; she recalls that “as a young girl growing up on the Osage reservation in Fairfax, Okla., I felt my father owned the town. He had property everywhere . . . [and] our 10-room, terracotta-brick house stood high on a hill overlooking the reservation” (Tallchief 4). Her mother saw that the family’s wealth was put to good use through the cultivation of Betty Marie (later Maria) and her sister Marjorie’s artistic talents. Thinking she was “grooming two musical dancing stars,” Ruth enrolled the girls in dance classes when Tallchief was three and a half years old, and soon after they were performing “Indian” dances at fairs.⁴

Ruth perceived traditional Osage dances to be too “lethargic” to truly capture the girls’ abilities, so Maria and Marjorie performed patriotic routines that were “part ballet, part vaudeville—to ‘Stars and Stripes Forever’ and ‘Glow Worm’ at community events, county fairs, and rodeos.” Tallchief writes that “the routine [we] performed made us both self-conscious,” describing that it wasn’t “remotely authentic” and that her costumes were particularly embarrassing, as she spent part of the routine garbed in “a costume my mother made by putting turquoise feathers onto her peach negligee” and “a cape that featured an American flag” (Tallchief 10). Their costumes, like their routines, were juxtapositions of American nostalgia and Americans’ nostalgia for their “native” past, allowing the audience to watch Indian girls engaging in “the pageantry and portraiture of dominance” (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 145). As a Native child performing for a primarily white public, Tallchief presented “Indianness” as an easily accessed selfhood, one that not only reinforced the coherence of American national identity but also gave audiences an easily digestible portrait of Native American “culture.” In sum, the Tall Chief girls were charming spectacles for their audience: “real” Indians performing seemingly Indian dances that were devoid of any cultural significance, constituting an actual “absence of natives” in the face of colonial surveillance (15).

These “simulations” continued, and in later routines the girls moved past the feathered nightgown and on to wearing “fringed buckskin outfits, headbands with feathers, and bells on [their] legs,” while their mother “spent hours putting [their] hair up in Shirley Temple curlers.” The look

was completed by the toe shoes that Maria “wore under [her] moccasins” during the performance. The routine reached its climax with her “going center stage and twirling around, while Marjorie made a circle around [her] performing the no-handed back-flip somersaults that she was so good at” (Tallchief 15). The clandestine toe shoes became synecdochal for the routine itself, as Tallchief and her sister were not performing a “remotely authentic” routine but instead were performing a role that was a white construction of Indianness; an assemblage of pan-Indian and Americana signifiers that allowed the audience to feel in control of the image and, therefore, not undermined by Indigeneity and its threat to the stability of their claims as Americans. However, their performance managed to be both a reduction of their identity and a sophisticated confluence of cultural mimics and erasures, as Philip Deloria explains that “Indian mimicry of Indianness back at white audiences made it clear that there was both a shared sense of expectation and a critical Indian intelligence at work” (*Indians* 130). Tallchief, aware of the effects of these “*indian* simulations,” quickly grew tired of being treated as “gimmicky” and insignificant and was glad when the girls mercifully outgrew the costumes and “put those bells away for good” (15).

These rodeo performances constituted Tallchief’s first experiences of being exposed to the expectations of a white audience who preferred to view Indigenous identities as being “novel” and stripped of their cultural complexity. Indeed, being continuously put on display to pander to her white audience’s expectations had a lasting negative effect on Tallchief, particularly on the way she desired to be perceived in her career. Reflecting on her childhood routines, Tallchief writes that, “[a]bove all, I wanted to be appreciated as a prima ballerina who *happened* to be Native American, never as someone who was an American Indian ballerina. Perhaps I was being sensitive because of the way Marjorie and I had been exploited when we were young girls, performing novelty dances as some kind of gimmick” (183, emphasis mine). At a young age, Tallchief learned that as a Native American, her identity carried the weight of European American preoccupations, and she was loath to embody the “cultural pageantry” of rodeo dances that “pictured the fugitive *indian* in the archives of dominance” (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 145). Once the bells had been retired, the Tall Chief family moved to California to access more skilled dance instructors,

and Tallchief's real education began with famed Russian ballerina Madame Bronislava Nijinska, a woman who had a hand in teaching Tallchief how to dominate the stage, rather than being cast as a novelty within a theater of dominance.

Under Nijinska, the Tall Chief sisters had to relearn the basics of technique, despite the fact that they had been dancing since they were children. Tallchief fondly recalled her training with Nijinska thusly: "When you walked into [Nijinska's] class it was like going to church. You didn't go into class prepared to do anything less than your maximum effort" (Cockerille 41). While the Tall Chief girls were learning how to properly execute their arabesques and port de bras, they were also learning how to embody the perfect ballerina, a Eurocentric idealization of femininity. In "Indian Ballerinas Toe Up: Maria Tallchief and Making Ballet 'American' in the Tribal Terminating Era," Rebekah J. Kowal explains how Tallchief had "synthesized the elements of her identity, as a woman and as a dancer through real and metaphorical bodily transformation" to fit the ideal of a dancer (83). When she made her debut in the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo company in 1942, Russian dancers were the paragon of balletic perfection, and the prevailing stereotype of an "American dancer was that of a thigh-slapping, gum-chewing tap dancer" (Cockerille 79), so as a *Native American*, Tallchief was at a distinct disadvantage in the eyes of her peers.

During her time with the Ballet Russe, Tallchief contended with being doubly Othered by her contemporaries, who upheld "the key ideologies describing Indian people—inevitable disappearance, primitive purity, and savage violence" (Deloria, *Indians* 10).⁵ To them, she was both an Indian in an "unexpected place" and an Indian whose familial wealth did not adhere to their expectations, threatening their sense of Russian and European dominance in ballet. On tour, the dancers had little money to spend on essentials, so Tallchief's parents would send her a five- or ten-dollar bill every so often to supplement her meager income, leading other dancers to gossip that she was successful in the company because her "father was a rich Indian and paying Denham to give [her] parts" (Cockerille 81). To them, Tallchief could not possibly have achieved her position within the company without the assistance of her "rich Indian" father, simultaneously conveying stereotypes of cultural inferiority and fears of "nouveau-riche" Indians. To offset this

scrutiny, Tallchief tucked away the money, preferring to scrape by on what little they were given, causing her to lose a dangerous amount of weight and fall ill.

However, Tallchief also pushed back against the assimilative effects of her environment and rejected the notion that she needed to *fully* synthesize her identity to fit that of a prototypical Russo-European dancer. We see an example of this resistance in her narration of a pivotal moment of public persona versus personal identity in her autobiography. Tallchief writes that early in her career with the Ballet Russes she was asked to “add an *a* to the end of [her] last name and call [herself] Tallchieva” in order to sound more Russian, which was the fashion in ballet at the time. She refused, asserting that “Tallchief was my name, and I was proud of it” (Tallchief 27). But she reasoned that changing her first name seemed logical, since there were so many “Elizabeths and Bettys” in the company; thus Betty Marie Tall Chief became Maria Tallchief (27). Her refusal to change her last name to a racially and ethnically different one simply by subtracting an *f* and adding a *va* to benefit her career constitutes an *anti*-assimilationist move, as Tallchief stood her ground against the “wholesale rejection of Indigenous values and their replacement with Eurowestern values” (Justice xvi).

Unlike that of her European contemporaries, Tallchief’s identity was inherently politicized and racialized, and she understood that the public for whom she was performing, in Deloria’s words, “desired *Indianness*, not Indians” (*Playing Indian* 90, emphasis mine). Her childhood exploitation had taught her the limits of the European and American imagination when it came to Indigenous peoples, and she did not wish to perform “nostalgia” nor “the melancholia of dominance” that her publics expected of her (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 25). Despite Tallchief’s hope to be seen for her abilities instead of her racial background, she found herself faced with interest in both, whether this interest was subtly or overtly conveyed. A few years into her collaboration with the famed choreographer (and her future spouse) George Balanchine, Tallchief had the singular honor of performing with the Paris Opera and was the first American ballerina to do so in over a century. The Paris Opera was perceived to be the “cradle of classical ballet, to be ranked as one of its ballerinas or *etoiles* was a very great honor” (Cockerille 94). Tallchief’s performance at the Paris Opera was critically acclaimed, but she recounts that despite the effusive praise, “something else besides

my dancing intrigued them—my background. To them, I could have been from outer space. Those were the days when Indians were called redskins in movies and books, and the French took it literally” (Tallchief 73). While Tallchief’s framing of these comments as “those were the days” appears to assign a historicity to the “redskin” appellation being applied to her, Western preoccupation and commodification of Native identity persists in our contemporary moment. Her effect of providing a counternarrative of indigeneity cannot be overemphasized, as the “redskins in movies and books” (much like the seemingly unshakeable Native mascots in North America) provide a convenient and limited perception of Native people, one that Westerners tend to take “literally.”

As Tallchief’s career continued to advance, her contentions with “lineages” became all the more prominent. As a dancer, when Tallchief took on a role, she would “inherit” its lineage of previous performances and “[was] compared to everyone who had ever danced that role” (Cockerille 89). However, her Parisian debut reflects a more unfortunate juxtaposition: boisterous praise for her performance and equally enthusiastic exoticization due to her heritage. Unlike other dancers, Tallchief’s predecessors were not only the popular dancers who had previously electrified audiences with their performances of principal roles but also the “redskins in movies and books” who shaped the expectations of a public who had little to no contact with actual Indigenous peoples. After combatting her fellow dancers’ contempt for her background, Tallchief now faced the fascinated European masses who regarded Native Americans with a misguided romanticism. When she made her debut for the Ballet Russes in New York, dancing the titular role in the *Chopin Concerto*, *New York Times* critic John Martin praised her performance and wrote that Tallchief was surely going to become “somebody. She is well off the beaten track in ballerina types but she is a ballerina as surely as this is Sunday” (Cockerille 83). A 1951 *Time* article also dichotomized Tallchief, calling her “as regal and exotic as a Russian princess,” yet as American as “wampum and Apple Pie” (qtd. in Kowal 80). Through her performances onstage and her public appearances, she presented herself as a postindian princess, disentangled from these early simulations and their “evasive melancholy of dominance,” much to the surprise of her audiences (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 11). In Tallchief they could not see an iteration of the “authentic” Indian of popular culture; instead, they were faced with an Indian ballerina without a familiar/accessible

referent who appeared to be disconnected from the historical narrative of atavism and represented a new kind of Indian to them: a thoroughly modern one, one they could not themselves dominate.

Tallchief's career continued its meteoric rise, and as George Balanchine's collaborator, muse, and, later, wife she was instrumental to the creation of an American ballet tradition. Lincoln Kirstein, the son of wealthy Bostonians and an enthusiastic supporter of the arts, became friends with Balanchine after hearing of his talent as a choreographer from a mutual acquaintance. In his diary, he records that during a conversation, Balanchine had admitted that "America has always been his dream, even before he left Russia" (Gottlieb 69). Indeed, "like many émigrés from Soviet Russia, Balanchine was . . . enamored of the American scene. He wore cowboy shirts with pearl snaps, Western-cut suits, string ties, and turquoise bracelets. He was unashamedly patriotic" (Tracy and DeLano 11). After a stint as a choreographer with Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo, where he met Tallchief, Balanchine had the opportunity he had been waiting for, thanks to Kirstein's financial assistance, and Tallchief joined him when her contract with the Ballet Russes was up.⁶ She was Balanchine's principal dancer when he founded Ballet Society, Inc., which later became the New York City Ballet. To Balanchine, Tallchief was more than a wife and principal dancer; as an Indigenous woman, she *was* America manifested, an original American who represented a link to the culture he adored and wished to emulate. Tallchief played a significant role in Balanchine's romantic notions of America and its rugged, Wild West allure. Tallchief writes that on more than one occasion, Balanchine informed her of his "fascination with [her] background" and "claimed that by marrying [her] he finally felt he was a real American," comparing their union to that of America's "first" couple, John Smith and Pocahontas (119). While Tallchief shares this anecdote in her memoir, Balanchine's delight at their designation as the "first" (chronologically and allegorically) couple of American ballet is indicative of the semiotic power of the Indian Princess, who embodied access to that essentialized "Americanness" that Balanchine coveted (Deloria, *Playing Indian* 103).

For Balanchine, Tallchief was his "key to the West," and he echoed the very fascination with her background that she had hoped to avoid in her career. Balanchine viewed America as a pristine space where his creative genius could flourish unimpeded, and his partnership with

Tallchief imbued him with a sense of cultural capital; by “casting” her as the original Indian Princess and himself as her chosen partner, he placed himself in an ideal position to establish a new ballet tradition in the unsophisticated “frontier” of American dance. Arlene Croce, the renowned dance critic for the *New Yorker* magazine, once wrote that ballet was “our civilization,” and in true form to her role as an Indian Princess in Balanchine’s company, Tallchief’s bodily performance was integral in bringing this “civilization” to America (qtd. in Gottlieb 5). However, I view Tallchief’s participation as an Indigenous woman in this arrangement as being more complex. Tria Blu Wakpa argues that “mainstream narratives particularly obscure Native women’s presence and work” and posits Native women as “culture creators,” rather than the more static assignation “culture bearers” (108–09). Through Wakpa’s terminology, we can view Tallchief as taking a more dynamic and active role in the establishing of an American ballet tradition; along with Balanchine, she was creating a new cultural form, and as an Osage woman, she was its public face.

We can see this attitude in Tallchief’s writing as she describes the important role she played as Balanchine’s partner; in her autobiography, she states that she recognized their marriage as symbolic in nature and “stood as an acknowledgement that New York City Ballet was a kind of family” (Tallchief 140–41). The idea of Tallchief and Balanchine creating a “family” hints again at the original myth of Pocahontas, whose union with John Rolfe is perceived as “birthing” the new nation, and reduces Tallchief to the “good” Indian princess, erasing her personal identity and agency in her partnership with Balanchine. Instead, Tallchief describes that “[Balanchine] never shrank from acknowledging [that] my talents in the service of his choreography were an impetus for him to found and establish the company, and that I continued to inspire him. He was also the first to admit that I was an audience favorite with devoted fans” (157). In fact, this partnership was clear to Tallchief’s adoring public, including John Martin, who extolled the prolific nature of their creative collaboration: “As she gives us each of the choreographer’s inventions, he is ready with another for her, as if he were actually feeding creatively on her performance” (qtd. in Kowal 79). Tallchief was not a passive, docile body within Balanchine’s project; she was at the helm of the NYC Ballet’s own autobiography, the “mistress of coming on stage like an electric current” and capturing her audience’s attention (Tracy and DeLano 123).

Her very presence as a Native woman in a public role and as America's first ballet dancer of note remapped the cultural landscape, refuting colonial gender limitations.

Tallchief embodied “movement” both as a dancer and as a Native woman exerting her own social mobility; indeed, Tallchief re/occupied spaces that were believed to be devoid of Indigenous presence. Deloria points out that in the post-Removal era, Native American dance practices became a point of contention in the eyes of white society because, like hunting, dance “represented mobility,” and “religious dances . . . suggested a willful breaking away from the hold of church and civilization” (Deloria, *Indians* 27). Therefore, Native American dance on American soil constituted an act of political and cultural resistance to the forces of assimilation; in essence, dance became an embodied refusal to disappear. In her editor's note to the Indigenous special issue of *Dance Research Journal*, Jacqueline Shea Murphy writes that contemporary Indigenous dance performance necessitates “shifting thinking to one where curators and organizers are *guests* on Indigenous land, as opposed to Indigenous artists being guests in our space” (3, emphasis mine). While Tallchief was dancing in a tradition different from that of her Osage heritage, she remains a Native woman who successfully used dance as a means to power in predominantly white spaces. As a Native woman, Tallchief may have been seen as an unexpected “guest” in this space; instead, her bodily performances defined excellence in dance on American soil, a *contested*—not unexpected—space for Indigenous people.

As her reputation grew, Tallchief's dance performances for NYC Ballet constituted a form of “territorial re-insurgence,” borrowing from Jayna Brown's term for the influx and influence of African American chorus girls on Broadway in the 1920s. Brown explains that their presence and popularity sparked a “fear of black invasion” and represented “the potential for ‘actual’ black bodies . . . to not just appear in but to *define* public and artistic space” on the Great White Way (210, emphasis mine). In *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern*, Brown describes the diaspora of African American women from the South to the North and how for these women, “fame—claiming a public presence—was an important form of demanding historical recognition”; subsequently, it was met by “white anxieties over black people's artistic presence and mobility” (210, 211).⁷ As a Native American woman, Tallchief also represented similar

anxieties about the ramifications of Indigenous mobility; however, the popular perception of Tallchief as an Indian Princess, paired with her highly disciplined performance style, evoked assimilation, and Tallchief's "body seemed to offer irrefutable proof that 'native' dancers could make ballet American" (Kowal 81).⁸ Thus, Tallchief's very "native" identity (her proverbial "Pocahontas-ness") ostensibly made her the ideal candidate for the job. But rather than fading into a secondary role, Tallchief claimed her distinct influence over the establishment of America's own ballet tradition.

Tallchief's assertive onstage persona helped her enact this aesthetic "territorial re-insurgence," sharply contrasting to the passivity ascribed to historical Indian Princesses. As Vizenor writes in *Fugitive Poses*, Native American presence in popular narrations was

included in the comparative notions of race, but not in the foundational sense of the nation. The reasons of vindication were aesthetic; natives were named in connection with the vast distances of an unexploited nation, and as a potential threat to the government. Natives, not slaves, had negotiated treaties and formed alliances with other governments; these associations were considered to be dangerous to the new constitutional democracy. Natives, in other words, were removed as a vindication of the environment. The *absence* of the *indian* in the histories of this nation is an aesthetic victimry. (12)

Tallchief's active onstage presence was an active contradiction to the erasure of Indigenous presence, and, ironically, her role in steering the NYCB from uncertainty to legitimacy ensured that she would not be erased from the "foundational sense" of the company and, in a greater sense, American ballet itself. Her body became a vehicle of autobiographical enactment, reinscribing her "postindian princess" counter-narratives on national and international stages. Tallchief took advantage of what Deidre Heddon describes as the stage's "unique temporality, its here and newness, and on its ability to respond to and engage with the present," and she challenged her audience to do the same by encountering her as a talented dancer in her own right (2). Moreover, we see evidence of Tallchief's *own* influence in this project through reviews of her performances. In his new company, Balanchine revisited ballets he had previously staged abroad but tweaked choreography to accommo-

date her signature style. Balanchine's choreography became a vehicle for Tallchief's talent, and according to critic Robert Gottlieb, she was a force to be reckoned with onstage. In a review of her performances, Gottlieb writes that "Tallchief dominated *Orpheus* and triumphed in the difficult *Symphony in C* . . . [which] perfectly suited her strong and assertive technique, her absolute command of the stage, and no one has ever improved on her performance in this role" (118). No shrinking violet, Tallchief became known for her mastery of technique, her work ethic, and her "empiricist" attitude toward ballet. Murphy writes that within performance studies, the act of dancing is seen as a form of "theorizing," as the "body is thinking, commenting, critiquing, investigating" (10); therefore, Tallchief's presence onstage and singular talent—which set her apart from a host of American, Russian, and European dancers—constituted a critique of Western assumptions of who could be understood as a ballerina or a "modern" Indian. Moreover, in contrast to the "passivity" that has been ascribed to the "ideal" Native woman, Tallchief is "assertive," maintains "absolute command of the stage," and presents the defining performance of the role.

These qualities were brought into fruition in Tallchief's breakout role as the eponymous Firebird in Igor Stravinsky's famous ballet (originally written for the Ballet Russes), which was based on a Russian fairytale about a magical bird with magical powers that proved to be a blessing and a curse for whoever possessed her. In 1949 Balanchine chose to restage Stravinsky's *Firebird* for the NYC Ballet and tailored his choreography to showcase Tallchief's particular talents as a dancer. As part of his reinvention, he "speeded up the action, created new material, and, most important, unleashed Tallchief in an electric star performance that secured the company's future and certified City Ballet as a major force in the dance world" (Gottlieb 118). Francisco Moncion, who performed the role of the Prince, added that "the ballet was made for Maria, and she went after it like a demon, with ferocity, as if possessed"; Balanchine allegedly once referred to her as a "tiger" in a conversation with dancer Robert Weiss (Gottlieb 119, 117–18). In these passages, Tallchief is centered as an "active presence" whose assertiveness contradicted the settler colonial tendency to cast Indigenous people as a disappeared relic of the past (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 145). In fact, Tallchief's "active presence" in *The Firebird* came at a critical moment for Balanchine's company, helping to secure its

future. *The Firebird* premiered during the difficult early years of the NYC Ballet, a time that Tallchief associated with costumes arriving at the last minute and uncertainty as to how an American audience would respond to Balanchine's artistic vision (Cockerille 96). However, after the ballet's debut, Tallchief's performance catapulted the company from uncertainty into legitimacy as an institution.

The defining moment for *The Firebird*, and for Tallchief's "mobility" as a dancer and a Native American woman penetrating the upper echelons of Western culture, came in a pivotal sequence during Tallchief and Moncion's pas de deux (French for "step of two"). Balanchine created a step for which there was "no balletic term," one so physically challenging that it made Tallchief grateful for the tumbling classes she took as a child, a particularity of her background that perhaps steered his decision to include the step. Tallchief describes the movement as follows: "After the first arabesque [a ballet position in which the dancer is poised on one leg with the other extended behind], turning to face Frank and giving him my hand, I performed a glissade, a traveling step. Then after a preparation, while he continued moving, I went flying through space and threw myself into his arms" (129). The first time Tallchief attempted this jump, she almost knocked Moncion down.

But on opening night, when it came time to execute this movement that caused them such anxiety, Tallchief recalls how they turned out an immaculate performance: "Standing upstage, I took a flying leap into Frank's arms. Suddenly there I was being held by him upside down, my head practically touching the floor. An audible sigh rose in the audience. . . . It was as if they could barely believe what they had seen" (130). Tallchief herself was astonished by her capability to complete such a feat in that moment and realized that "I had become this magical creature, the Firebird, yet I knew I had become the Firebird because George had made me the Firebird. His genius had never been as clear to me as it was in that instant" (131).⁹ While it may be tempting to read Tallchief's admiration of Balanchine's choreography as self-deprecating, Tallchief sees herself as the "magical creature," transformed in body (and, I would argue, transforming social perceptions). Moreover, Tallchief's own background in tumbling and her signature style influenced Balanchine's choreography, indicating that she herself had a pivotal role to play in shaping the ballet even before taking on the role of the Firebird itself.

Much like the complicated jump that solidified her reputation as a dancer, Tallchief herself was also an innovative and exciting balletic element “for which there was no [preexisting] balletic term” (Tallchief 129). While Balanchine was creating a new paradigm of movement within ballet, she was creating a space for herself not only as America’s first prima ballerina but also as the first prima of Native heritage. For Tallchief, the stage became a site of identity reinscription, a place where she could control her own narrative. Through her postindian princess counternarrative, she was able to demonstrate that Indigenous people could exert their own agency and influence over Western institutions, rather than being absorbed within them. Heddon writes that “performance, as a medium, is particularly suited to a political agenda because it is capable of staging a direct and immediate address to the spectator” (6). While Tallchief continually reiterated her desire to not be seen as an “American Indian ballerina” and did not wish for her racial identity to factor into assessments of her performances, her desire to escape this phenomenon is itself a “political agenda,” one concerned with resisting her childhood memories of being made to feel “gimmicky” by playing Indian for white spectators at fairs and rodeos. Moreover, as a non-white dancer, she was expected to emulate, to attempt to achieve but never fully embody the Russo-European ideal; to be, as Homi Bhabha describes, “*almost the same, but not quite*” as her fellow dancers, whose racial heritage was perceived as necessary to their success (122, emphasis original). Instead, Tallchief rejected both the notion that she was inherently inferior and the unbearable burden of “authenticity” ascribed to Indigenous people and modeled herself into an aesthetic “re-insurgent,” making her mark as a Native woman on American soil in an art form previously estranged from American audiences.

Balanchine may have made Tallchief the Firebird, but Tallchief *was* the Firebird; a singular presence within the world of ballet who took the role of a lifetime and made it her own. Indeed, the *Newsweek* review of *The Firebird* lauded Tallchief as “so sure, strong and brilliant that it is doubtful if as superior a technician exists anywhere. She is so dazzling as the Firebird that she seemed almost not to need the support of her partner” (qtd. in Tallchief 132). I read this review as both describing Tallchief’s technical brilliance in relation to her dance partner in *The Firebird*, Frank Moncion, and inadvertently prophesying that Tallchief would have a celebrated career outside of her “partnerships” with

Balanchine both as a husband and as a choreographer. Her performances in *The Firebird*, as well as in the other roles he choreographed especially for her, cemented the company's reputation as being on the vanguard of a new era in ballet, one that was *distinctly* American. Lili Cockerille notes that Balanchine and Tallchief's collaboration "created an alchemy that changed the tempo of classical ballet" and that his "star pupil, Maria became the prototype for a new breed of classical dancer—the Balanchine ballerina" (96). In this sense, Tallchief's influence demonstrates how Native Americans "have always participated in the *production* of modern discourse—and of modernity itself," rather than being victims to its inexorable march or merely reactive to its pressures (Deloria, *Indians* 238).¹⁰ Tallchief was the first American Balanchine ballerina, and her work with Balanchine and the New York City Ballet created a new, inherently American ballet tradition that was internationally recognized for its innovation and its exceptional, and "unexpected," star.

A few years later, Tallchief received one of her most precious accolades: the title of Princess Wa-Xthe-Thonba, Princess Two Standards, a name selected by Grandma Tall Chief, who chose it to acknowledge that "while I was a ballerina with an important career on the stage, I was also her grandchild, an Osage woman and daughter of the tribe" (183). June 29 became Maria Tallchief Day in the Osage Nation, and at the ceremony, she was presented with many gifts, including a ceremonial headdress "traditionally worn by chiefs and Osage men." She writes that she felt immense "pride" that day, but, "proud as I was, it had always been important for me to have people understand that no concessions were ever made for me as a ballerina because of my ethnic background; the same rigorous standards that were applied to every Russian, French, English, or American dancer were equally applied to me" (Tallchief 183). The title of Princess Two-Standards encapsulated the boundary-crossing nature of Tallchief's success, as well as the success of her aesthetic "territorial re-insurgence." Tallchief is correct that no favors were done for her in her career; in fact, another set of standards, rooted in colonial anxieties and narratives of white dominance, were applied to her. A 1954 *Newsweek* cover story on Tallchief extolled her as "symboliz[ing] a new order in the ancient and honorable clan of ballerinas," and her career continued to reach new heights even after she parted with Balanchine and the NYCB (qtd. in Tallchief 197). As

her name Princess Two-Standards suggests, Tallchief was a postindian princess, one who outperformed her assumed superiors and who defied standards that attempted to dictate her abilities. She was more than an unexpected interloper who not only mimicked Western dance but also influenced its trajectory, and she continues to be celebrated as a truly groundbreaking woman, a woman of two standards.

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NOTES

1. In “The Pocahontas Perplex,” Green describes how through the colonial enforcement of heteropatriarchal norms, Native women became yoked to limiting dichotomies of femininity, specifically that of the “Princess” and the “Squaw,” both “defined in terms of [their] relationship with male figures” who sought to control or exploit them. While the “Squaw” is cast as a sexualized Other, the Indian Princess is her “civilized” (i.e. “white”) inverse, possessing phenotypical and behavioral characteristics assumed to be endemic to Western cultures (Green 703).

2. Jacqueline Shea Murphy explains that the challenges of discussing Indigenous experience require “attentive awareness to complex and ongoing histories of location and dislocation, of seizing and selling, of invisibilization and incorporation, of trashing and taking, of treaties and translations and no treaties and no translations, of desire and disdain” (“Editor’s Note” 2).

3. Oil was first discovered on the Osage reservation in Oklahoma in 1896, and by the 1920s the Osage Nation was bringing in roughly \$27 million annually from their many oil wells, making them one of the wealthiest groups of people in the world. Their fortune was the subject of disdain and envy, as one *Times* reporter conveyed in the following statement in 1932: “Osage Indians did not always ride in limousines, squat in blankets among Grand Rapids furniture and generally give a pathetically good imitation of nouveaux riches the world over” (Stephey). Their fortune also

turned deadly, as a string of murders rocked the Osage Nation. See Stephey..

4. Tallchief, her sister, Marjorie Tallchief, Moscelyne Larkin, Rosella Hightower, and Yvonne Chouteau were known as the Oklahoma Indian Ballerinas, a coterie of celebrated Native dancers who were born in Oklahoma and rose to fame during the mid-twentieth century. Some of the women even danced together in the same companies. All of these women displayed immense talent for dance and were internationally renowned, and Maria Tallchief was a phenomenon in her own right (see Anderson).

5. Tallchief recalls how when she first moved to California, her classmates in her new school mocked her last name and “made war whoops whenever they saw [her], and asked why [she] didn’t wear feathers or if [her] father took scalps” (14–15).

6. Ballet Society, Inc. (later New York City Ballet), was Kirstein and Balanchine’s second attempt at creating a company, the initial attempt having ended in disaster. For further information, see Gottlieb.

7. On the other hand, Brown writes that during the modern era, “black folk culture represented the recovery of lost community and cohesion . . . and the trade in black culture came under scrutiny. The light-skinned, rootless, single, and independent chorus girls became symbols of decadent cultural dissipation. They were seen as colluding with the very system that oppressed black people” (191).

8. Kowal describes how print media “naturalized Tallchief herself as an invented fusion of types: the ‘exotic’ and the ‘American’; the ‘Russian princess,’ the ‘girl next door’; and the foreign and the assimilated, the non-white and the Anglo—an amalgamation of fantasies that at once disparaged and idealized her” (86).

9. In a manner most fitting, John Martin from the *New York Times* wrote a paean to the accomplishments of the NYCB and its star in *The Firebird*, rhapsodizing that “at this Thanksgiving season, let us acknowledge with gratitude that we have a ballet company of our own. . . . What more one can ask of any company it would be difficult to say” (Tracy and DeLano 95).

10. Alternatively, Tallchief was also met by resistance from Native American communities. She was invited by Dave Garroway, a TV host for a show called *One World*, to take part in an episode in which she would dance for American Indian children. Tallchief agreed, stating that “as an Indian and a ballerina, I would be helping to bring two different cultures—two worlds—together” (301). While the children and their parents attended the rehearsal and were ostensibly elated by the performance, no one showed up for the telecast itself. Tallchief learned that someone had complained that “classical ballet had nothing to do with Indian culture and had prevented the children from attending. The implication was that we were exploiting them, which wasn’t the case. Whoever was in charge wanted no part in what he or she saw as Indian culture being infiltrated by a Western art form. It was a sensitive issue, and I understood it. I went on, but the performance had little meaning for me” (302).

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Bending, Turning, and Growing

Cree Language, Laws, and Ceremony in Louise B. Halfe /
Sky Dancer's *The Crooked Good*

ANGELA VAN ESSEN

The Crooked Good, nêhiyaw poet Louise B. Halfe / Sky Dancer's third book of poetry, is an epic poem that narrates ê-kwêskît's journey toward healing.¹ This story is complex and multilayered, because her journey is neither singular nor straightforward. Instead, her journey is curved, circular, and deeply connected to the stories of her relatives: her ancestors, her children, her siblings, and her parents. Her path is also intimately tied to ceremony, language, land, and sacred stories. Indeed, the book can be understood as a journey home, where, as nêhiyaw scholar and poet Neal McLeod explains, "Being home' means to be a nation. . . . It involves having a collective sense of dignity. A collective memory emerges from a specific location, spatially and temporally, and includes such things as relationship with the land, songs, ceremonies, language, and stories" (*Cree Narrative Memory* 54).² I do not intend to explore all of the complex aspects of peoplehood and nêhiyaw sovereignty in *The Crooked Good* in this article, but I do maintain that in order to understand this book on a deeper level, readers must pay close attention to the nêhiyaw itwêwina (the Cree words) that Louise Halfe uses in her poetry, because these words are deeply rooted in nêhiyaw laws, histories, sacred stories, and ceremonies; these words guide readers home, where home is nêhi-yânâhk (Cree territory).

In many instances, these words are what Métis writer Maria Campbell and others have termed *word bundles*.³ In a 2004 interview Campbell explained how she cautions her students "not to just settle for the word, but imagine that the word is carrying this big huge bundle. What's inside? What are the roots of that word? What is the story? Is there a song in the bundle, a ceremony, a protocol? Where did it come from? The word bundle is full of treasure" (200). This concept of a word bundle

is especially productive given the polysynthetic nature of nêhiyawêwin, as well as the nested meanings that reside in itwêwina. When describing Anishinaabemowin, an Algonquian language that is closely related to nêhiyawêwin, Basil H. Johnston tells us that “in my tribal language, all words have three levels of meaning: There is the surface meaning that everyone instantly understands. Beneath this meaning is a more fundamental meaning derived from the prefixes and their combinations with other terms. Underlying both is the philosophical meaning” (6). nêhiyawêwin is structured similarly, and each Cree word, therefore, has nested layers of meaning. In paying close attention to just a few of the nêhiyaw itwêwina in *The Crooked Good*, I demonstrate how one word can function as a “big huge bundle” because of the layers of meaning it has, as well as the connections it has to other words, ceremonies, and laws. By performing this sort of reading, I am purposefully not settling for the surface layer of the words or for the glossed English translations (provided at the back of the book). Instead, I demonstrate that by approaching these words with care, curiosity, and respect—and in relationship with nêhiyawak (Plains Cree people)—these words begin to open up the text in ways that connect our understanding of the narrative to the rich Cree intellectual traditions that underpin Halfe’s work.

This approach to the text was initially guided by an Indigenous literary nationalist approach, with the movement’s foundational scholars, such as Robert Warrior, calling for critics to see Indigenous studies as growing out of a longer intellectual history, suggesting that Indigenous literatures should be read in their particular historical and tribal contexts. In his article “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?” Scott Richard Lyons reminds educators and scholars that teaching and studying Indigenous literature is always political and that this work should ideally “focus on local and community levels in hopes of lending support to the work already being done there” (465). He goes on to point out that “every university and school exists in a place, on a land, with a history and a community of struggles: every place has its peoples” (465). Thus I find Daniel Heath Justice’s sense that ethical Native literary criticism “is about relationships, about attending to the cultural, historical, political, and intellectual contexts from which indigenous texts emerge” useful (165). Since I live and work in amiskwacîwâskahikan (Edmonton), a place with a long history as a gathering place for many Indigenous nations, I see it

as my responsibility as a non-Indigenous teacher and literary scholar to learn about this place, its Indigenous history, its Indigenous peoples, and the struggles they face. In focusing chiefly on Cree scholarship, language, and intellectual traditions, I seek to prioritize this knowledge that is not only local to the place that I call home—but is also where *The Crooked Good* is grounded. In this work, I am particularly drawn to and challenged by Johnston's assertion that "without the benefit of knowing the language of the Indian nation that they are investigating, scholars can never get into their minds the heart and soul and spirit of a culture and understand the Native's perceptions and interpretations" (5). In learning the language, I have become more aware of the challenges many nêhiyawak face when it comes to learning to speak this threatened language, a language that Canada's Indian residential school system violently suppressed and sought to eradicate. At the same time, I am inspired by the work being done in nêhiyaw communities all across the prairies, particularly with language revitalization efforts.⁴

My reading of this text is therefore deeply connected to my journey with nêhiyawêwin and with nêhiyawak, and I offer the following as a way to share some knowledge that may help readers understand this text more fully. I am not a fluent speaker of nêhiyawêwin, but over the past nine years I have been honored to learn from many gifted Cree language teachers, including Dorothy Thunder, Kenneth Paupanekis, Jerry Saddleback, and Reuben Quinn, and I am deeply grateful for everything they have shared with me. Yet I am a language learner and a non-Native scholar, and any mistakes I make are mine alone. It is my hope that this article will help those who long, as I do, to understand some of the mystery of *The Crooked Good*.⁵ In writing and publishing this work I seek to honor the narrative, the author, the Cree language, and nêhiyawak.

TURNING AROUND

Although there are many voices that speak, sing, and tell their stories on the pages of *The Crooked Good*, we see the world and hear the stories mainly through ê-kwêskî, Turn Around Woman.⁶ This Cree name deserves a closer look: at the heart of this name is the imperative verb kwêskî, which can be understood as a command to turn, turn about, or turn around.⁷ The name is composed of the verb in the conjunct mode, third-person singular.⁸ Therefore, this name can also be translated as a

sentence: “she is turning around” or “she turns around.”⁹ As scholars, speakers, and educators have pointed out, Cree does not differentiate between male and female in the third-person singular—as Tomson Highway explains, “The most explicit distinguishing feature between the North American Indian languages and the European languages is that in Indian (e.g. Cree, Ojibway), there is no gender. In Cree, Ojibway, etc., unlike English, French, German, etc., the male-female-neuter hierarchy is entirely absent” (n.p.). The *she* in this sentence, ê-kwêskît, “she is turning around,” is understood as female from the context of Halfé’s poetry: readers are explicitly introduced to this speaker in the second poem, “wêpinâson,” where she declares, “This I saw, ê-kwêskît—Turn Around Woman. I am she” (*Crooked Good* 2). The grammatical construction of this name is important, however, not because of the gender-neutral aspect of the third-person singular but because this name, at its core, is an action, a verb. ê-kwêskît is the only character to be given a name composed of an animate intransitive verb.¹⁰ Instead of naming her isk-wêw kâ-kwêskît (the woman who turns around), Halfé chooses to give her narrator a name that is not noun-like at all but is a verb in the conjunct mode, which, in many contexts, suggests a continuous or ongoing action. nêhiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach suggests that the conjunct mode (and its common, if not predominant, use by fluent speakers) “suggests a worldview that honours the present, what we now know. It also suggests a worldview that focuses as much, if not more, attention on process than on product or outcome” (66). Thus ê-kwêskît’s name emphasizes the ongoing and ever-present choices involved in healing, the ongoing process of self-understanding, and coming home. Indeed, in the context of McLeod’s concept of coming home through stories (a central idea explored in *Cree Narrative Memory*) and also by seeing the verb kwêskî in the conjunct mode, one could also read ê-kwêskît as related to the concept of returning, or returning home. In his recent book, *100 Days of Cree*, McLeod suggests that the word ê-kweskit might be useful to get at the concept of regaining honor. He explains that we “have all made mistakes, but perhaps when we turn our lives around, when we atone, then we move towards regaining our honour” (9–10). ê-kwêskît is a woman who is turning around, a woman who is working at turning her life around, a woman who is returning to her language and ceremonies, a woman who is actively returning to the stories and histories that have shaped her in order to move forward a little

more intact.¹¹ In regaining her honor she is also contributing to the wider goal of regaining a collective sense of dignity and understanding. The action, the movement that is attached to her name, imbues her character with agency that is important for understanding her role in the text as a whole. Halfe's English translation, although beautiful, does not capture the powerful verb-based quality ê-kwêskît's Cree name carries.

VIOLENCE AND ROMANTIC FEVER

ê-kwêskît weaves together female stories in order to turn her life around; in bending the roots and branches of these memories, she creates a path that allows her to turn back home. From the outset, she makes it clear that she is "not a saint" but is rather "a crooked good" (Halfe, *Crooked Good* 4). In order to understand the profoundly Cree-centered philosophy behind the phrase "crooked good," it is important to first take a closer look at the narrative itself and the crooked paths and stories that brought ê-kwêskît to her turning point. She has a past marked by promiscuity, claiming that she "didn't / know their women wept when their men / slept in my bed" (4). Indeed, many of her relatives struggle with "romantic fever": ê-kwêskît tells us that

Romantic fever runs in my family.
Men's. Women's.
A catching disease. (98)

Woven throughout the text are stories of yearning, stories about lost loves, arranged marriages, and the conflicting desires of women. In the poem "Beheading," we read that ê-kwêskît's mother, aspin, had dreams of becoming an army nurse in the Second World War and that she was deeply attracted to another man, but she was married off to wâpistikwân. At several points in the text she repeats, "*I did the leaving. I never marry him, White Hair / did the marrying. . . . Not me. Not ever. I had no say*" (13, 34). It is important to note that aspin's desire for love and tenderness points to a lack of these things in her marriage; moreover, her desire and her yearning poignantly underline the abuse she endures in her marriage to wâpistikân, a violent alcoholic. When aspin was a newlywed,

she guarded her thoughts,
covered her blotched face with creams. Hands grew inward.
She averted her eyes for fear they'd run. (88)

Years later she tells her daughter,

*I waited all my life for the love I lost. pāhpiwiyniw—
Laughing Man from Red Iron. Stingy old bag spooked him
good. I know Onion Man long time. We too had long wait.
And that old bugger, your father, smoke, drank himself—if it
weren't for him these hands would work, feet would still
dance. (35)*

aspin seems to have little agency in her life: she has no say as to whom she marries, what dreams she follows, and instead lives in the shadow of violence. And like her children and her parents and grandparents before her, she had no say about whether or not she would attend residential school. We read that “boarding school pinned her arms,” thus making it difficult to embrace her children or show them a mother’s affection (13). ê-kwêskit’s ôhkoma, aspin’s mother, is also cut off from her children through her residential school experience: she dresses “like the French women she studied under. / Ruled the house like the Oblate Sisters” (34), which evidentially means she makes her daughter work hard at starching and ironing her mother’s clothes, but she herself is stingy with her love. And whereas aspin’s mother attends the reserve’s fiddle dances, she is overly controlling of her daughter’s social life, caging her “as if she was like Rapunzel” (34, 13). Thus the powerless refrain, “I had no say,” is deeply connected to colonial violence, and this violence is responsible for the way her children are cut off from the nourishment they need in order to thrive; indeed, aspin says,

*If I could breathe I would teach you these—
short muffled song
I never heard it again. (35)*

She is unable to provide the love, the care, and the guidance her children need, and she is unable to pass on the nêhiyaw songs, language, or knowledge they hunger for. aspin later concedes, “We gave our children to Indian Affairs. / To the priest. Nuns. . . . At least I gave them winter stories” (41). Because of this domestic and systemic violence, aspin later tells her daughters how

she could never see beyond the
crushed chokecherries on granite.

Pounded on a lifeless fridge, a jar
opened her arm. She sucked the juice,
sprinkled sweet sickness, fried berries
and fed us. (35–36)

This is how the poem “Beheading” closes, and I read this passage as aspin’s admission that the violence in their home and the violence of colonization prevented her from nourishing and raising her children the way she would have wanted. Indeed, what she feeds her children is at best a mixed blessing, since this “sweet sickness” is associated with both language loss and promiscuity.

ê-kwêskît tells us that “the sickness of the lost tongue / stole my sleep” (61). At the same time, this phrase “sweet sickness” becomes the title of a later poem about Three Person, ê-kwêskît’s older sister, who also suffers from “romantic fever” (93). In that poem and in “The White Goddess,” Three Person suffers violence in the context of romantic relationships and succumbs to the power that sexual desire has over her. However, it is imperative for readers to notice that Three Person is haunted by sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual violence. As a very young child, she was sexually abused by her stepfather, though no one acknowledges this. In fact, when she tries to bring this secret to light, she is violently silenced by her mother. In the poem “The White Goddess,” the speaker of the poem tells us:

No one knows *wâpistikwân* dug
into her diapers. . . .

One day Three Person told *aspin*
her sin. *aspin* screeched. Told her not to lie.
Struck her with a cast iron frying pan.
Left a bald spot. (84)

ê-kwêskît tells us that she and her siblings

lost our bundles, wandered maggot streets,
collected toys from throw away sites. Courted beneath
blankets behind bars.

Three Person made fatherless babies.
They fought for her dangling breasts
and learned to hate men with bad breath. (25)

We also read that as an adult Three Person marries *mâtahan*, a violent man who scrapes and gouges her skull, leaving wounds that create scars, “white islands hidden beneath her hair” (14). In marriage she “became a pounding board, a cave / where he left his squish” (39). The abuse she experiences throughout her life is both inherited and passed down to her children. Because of the silence surrounding sexuality and abuse, Three Person’s children do not escape sexual violence. Not only do they learn to “hate men with bad breath,” but readers also witness how

A child’s ear leaked.
Another was strangled by invisible hands.
A son robbed a daughter’s night.
White Goddess did not see,
so twisted in the sweet tongue. (85)

It is important to note that in this poem it is “[r]omantic fever [that] grabbed clumps of hair, / stuck a needle in Three Person’s head” (85). In an effort to excise this unhealthy obsession, Three Person digs a worm from her heart (85), but this does not cure her. The snake that blinks “its sweet tongue” (85) lures her, eventually blinding her to her children’s sexual abuse. Therefore, although it is at times tempting to simply celebrate Halfe’s sympathetic and profound exploration of female sexual desire, a careful reading of the book also reveals that “romantic fever” can be destructive; the passages above illustrates how romantic fever can blind a mother to the abuse of her very own children. (This is also an important teaching in the sacred story of the Rolling Head, which features a woman who seems to forget about caring for her children as she becomes obsessed with her clandestine snake-lover.)¹²

Unlike her mother and older sister, *ê-kwêskît* marries a kind, loving, and gentle man; yet she does not escape the helpless refrain: “I had no say.” She sees herself as a “give-away, / a daughter of the country / in a mountain marriage” (59). She remembers the many marriages between Cree women and fur-trader husbands that came before her, and this legacy reminds her that “[l]ove no matter how deep / has its penalties” (59). In remembering this part of her people’s history, the voices of her female ancestors jostle for her attention as she records them on the page. She tells us that

nôhkomak’s voices keep interrupting, eager
to have their say. I see them, give-away brides

starry-eyed as I, as they trudged behind
 their fur-trader husbands. (60)

She then goes on to record snippets of her ancestors' stories of love, loss, betrayal, and longing. It is significant that through ê-kwêskî's writing, as she weaves these voices into the fabric of her narrative, these women are finally able to "have their say." It is through the writing process and in the stability of her marriage to her beloved that ê-kwêskî is able to turn her life around; it is here—and in the context of the promise she made in ceremony—where ê-kwêskî earns her name.

CEREMONY AND WRITING

How to discuss the role of ceremony in *The Crooked Good* in a respectful and careful manner is a question with which I struggle. Ceremony is an essential part of the narrative, yet there are rules and protocols about what can be written and what should remain private. As Kathleen Absolon explains in her book *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know*, "[C]eremonies are a source of knowledge—knowledge that comes directly from the spiritual realm—and are sacred, so Indigenous searchers limit what they detail" (123). In his chapter in *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*, Daniel Morley Johnson cautions readers that "revealing sacred knowledge is a serious offence in many Indigenous nations" (216), and this is true to varying degrees among Cree nations. At the same time, Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt point out that "Elders and spiritual leaders are careful not to unduly share all their sacred information and practices, but they are willing to share sufficient material to allow non-Aboriginal people to better understand First Nations' world view" (15). I am not an expert on these rules and limitations, so I have made a point of consulting with mentors and teachers, including Louise Halfe, as I go. I am only beginning to learn about Cree ceremony with the help and guidance of nêhiyaw mentors and friends, so I begin this section of the article by acknowledging that my understanding and knowledge are limited. Given my position as a learner and a cultural outsider, I will do my best to read Halfe's work in a good way, keeping in mind that some aspects and details about the ceremonies I have participated in and learned about should not be included here.

The meaning of ê-kwêskît's name (she is turning around) and the healing ceremony she participates in (of which the writing of the book is a part) call to mind the turning that takes place in Cree ceremony, where participants address four directions. Indeed, the book gives a clear example of this when the speaker says, "I address the directions. / *wâpanohk, âpihtâ-kisikânohk. pahkisimotâhk. kiwêtinotâhk*" (70) (which can be translated as "toward the dawn, or east; toward the half day, or south; toward the dropping of the sun, or west; toward the north, or north wind"). This turning action that takes place in ceremony is also deeply connected to nêhiyaw writing traditions. In fact, the nêhiyaw star chart is structured in a design that points in eight directions. The chart begins in the east direction with ◁, the first spirit marker in the first grandfather direction, and is composed of four ◁"C"PV"Δbα (ahtahkipêhikana; spirit markers or syllabics). It then turns clockwise and points in the southeast direction, the first grandmother direction (you must imagine the chart drawn on the land or written in the stars; these directions do not make sense from a Western cartographic perspective where maps are sometimes hung on walls or printed in books and north points "up") and is composed of seven ◁"C"PV"Δbα. Reuben Quinn tells his students that there are teachings connected to each of these directions and to the numbers 4 and 7, and there are human laws connected to each of the forty-four spirit markers.¹³ As I read *The Crooked Good* and see that the "Snake Woman" image turns to point in eight directions, I am reminded that there are teachings that sit with each of these directions and that there are laws connected to each of the spirit markers.¹⁴ The star chart and the book itself can therefore both be understood as kiskinowâcihcikana. Wolvengrey's dictionary translates kiskinowâcihcikana as a "beacon light," or a "sign." But Reuben taught us that it means "something that teaches you about life": "The pipe is a teacher, the sweat lodge is a teacher, the Sundance is a teacher, and anything that's round—the sun, the nest; those are all teachers" (Feb. 23, 2016). In this context, then, it makes sense that ê-kwêskît's journey, her turning around and her coming home, involves both writing and ceremony. In this way, I can understand ê-kwêskît's turning as awa nêhiyawiskwêw opimâtisowin, this Cree woman's life journey wherein she is changing her way of life, ê-kwêskipimâtisit, she is trying to embody or put into practice the Cree teachings in each direction. I see her turning imbued with ceremony.

RIB WOMAN

ê-kwêskît's journey toward healing begins in Rib Woman. In "Braids," ê-kwêskît explains:

Rosehips boiled in honey
are not enough.
Skunk oil in lungs
is not enough.
Snake dripped in ears
is not enough.
Sweltering rocks split the acorn of
miskîsikwa—One's Big Heavens
making the clouds weep—
this is the beginning. (19)

Rib Woman is a central figure in *The Crooked Good*. Although literary scholar Jennifer Andrews suggests that she represents Eve, the Judeo-Christian first woman who, according to the book of Genesis, was made from one of Adam's ribs, and, similarly, Mareike Neuhaus proposes that Rib Woman is a symbol "of adultery, of an adulterous life, and of adulterous women more generally" (*Decolonizing* 184), I argue that Rib Woman should be read first and foremost as a sweat lodge. For instance, early on in the text, ê-kwêskît tells her readers that she "learned how to build Rib Woman / one willow at a time, one skin at a time" (4). Sylvia McAdam describes a sweat lodge as a lodge "constructed from willows bent to form a dome shape and covered with blankets, tarps, or canvas" (*Cultural* 27). Indeed, in a conversation Louise Halfe mentioned that the sweat lodge has two different names in Cree: *matotisân* and *wâkinokwân*.¹⁵ Reuben Quinn explained that this latter term literally means "a bent lodge." In Wolvengrey's dictionary, there are many related words that begin with the morpheme, *wâk(i)*: *wâkapiw*: s/he sits crooked or bent over; *wâkâs*: a banana (named thus because it is bent or curved); *wâkinâwak*, canoe ribs, *wâkinew*, s/he bends something by hand. In the poem "*wîhtikow sâkahikan—nêhiyânâhk*," the speaker emphasizes the bending of the willows in the making of her lodge: "My axe severs the willows. . . . Bend, bend— / willows shoved into the earth" (70). This act of bending is part of the process of building both the sweat lodge and the book itself. ê-kweskit tells us, "I build this story like my lair.

One willow, / a rib at a time. Bent it into my hip, grounded into earth” (6). It is a physical act, one that puts her body, the willow, and the earth into an intimate relationship. And it is a sacred act, one that involves prayer, struggle, and the help or aid of all her relations. This bending of the willows is connected to the title of the book itself, so that the word *crooked* takes on some of the graceful connotations of the word *bend*. This bending is part of a process of growing, of healing, and of sacrifice: ê-kweskît “bled the willows, draped skins, hide, blankets, tarps / over their crippled bodies” (6). Thus the willows have sacrificed their bodies and have bled in order for the lodge, and the book, to take shape. The growth and the healing that these ceremonies facilitate are deeply tied to the bending and the sacrifice of the willows. In Halfé’s lecture “Green Earth: The Wounded Healer,” she explains that “all that which grows does not grow up as tall and straight as we wish to believe. Growth has many paths, curves, hills, and bends. We are related within that context, wâhkôhtowin.”

The other Cree name for the sweat lodge, *matotîsân*, echoes the word *mâto*, which means *cry*.¹⁶ Louise Halfé told me that “matotîsân . . . means crying with my relatives.” She went on to explain how “all of the relatives that are in there, the earth, the ants and the creatures and the rocks and the willows and the hides, those are all of your relatives, and not only are they human beings but also those entities are honouring and witnessing and validating your pain” (interview, Saskatoon, Dec. 17, 2015). Thus Rib Woman, on one level, is the lodge where people come to pray, to cry, to sing, and to heal. And in this prayer, in this ceremony, a deep connection is acknowledged, created, and nurtured not only among the human participants in the ceremony but also among the nonhuman participants: the willows, the sweetgrass, the stones, the earth, the grandmothers and grandfathers, and more. These relations are remembered and honored in Rib Woman, and the prayers and pain that these relations witness are carried and marked by the willows, the ribs of the lodge. In “The Last Message,” the speaker of the poem remembers a dream that came to her the night she stripped the old lodge in the spring, preparing to rebuild it in the morning. In her dream

The ribs of men, women, children struggled
to lift the ribbons, cloth, blankets they
had worn.
They sobbed as they worked. (120)

Thus the memories of these prayers are worn by the willows: they wear the wepinâsona (cloth offerings) and other ceremonial offerings that the weepers brought with them into the lodge. The work of remembering, witnessing, and renewing is carried out not only by humans, and not only in this physical dimension, but also by nonhuman beings, as witnessed by the speaker of the poem in her dream.

WÂHKÔHTOWIN

Central to this ceremony is one of the forty-four human laws embedded in the star chart: wâhkôhtowin. This is not a term that is easy to translate into English. wâhkôhtowin is translated in Wolvengrey's dictionary as "relationship." It is sometimes translated as "kinship," and McAdam translates it as "generation" ("The Pipe Laws"). This last translation suggests that the nêhiyaw concept of wâhkôhtowin is informed by a responsibility to the many generations that came before us, as well as the many generations yet to come. In Diana Steinhauer's talk "Traditional Woman Teachings," she taught that the law of wâhkôhtowin, particularly for women, means that women must speak on behalf of those who cannot speak: the children yet to come, the plants, and the animals. McAdam suggests that there are actually two related nêhiyaw laws that sometimes get used interchangeably: wâhkômtowin refers to "the blood kinship of human beings," while wâhkôhtowin "is used to describe the kinship connections to all of creation" (*Nationhood* 60).

In her keynote address at the 2016 Indigenous Languages Conference at University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills, McAdam explained that the /m/ in wâhkômtowin is connected to mihko, the nêhiyaw word for "blood." My understanding of a nêhiyaw perspective on wâhkômtowin is limited because I grew up in a Dutch Canadian family using Dutch and English words to refer to my relatives. However, kinship is always an important topic in Cree language courses, and from what I have gathered through learning the language, wâhkômtowin brings to mind intimacy, closeness, and inheritance. In nêhiyawêwin, to refer to "my relatives" or "my relations" one would say niwâhkômakekanak. Cree kinship terms are complex and reveal a distinct perspective on kinship that is not the same as that in the English language or in mainstream North American culture, with its limited focus on the nuclear family. For example, in Plains Cree culture there

is a closeness between sisters that ripples through a web of relations and generations. To illustrate, a Cree speaker would refer to their mother's sister as *nikâwîs*, which is the diminutive form of *nikâwiy*, "my mother." An English translation could be "my little mother." If that aunty has children, that Cree niece of hers would refer to them using the same kinship terms that she would use to refer to her own siblings. Along the same line, that "little mother" or aunty would refer to her niece using the same term she would use to refer to her own daughter, *nitânis*. There is also a word that Reuben taught us, *kiwe-wâhkômtowin*, which means "going home relations," and this concept refers to the way that relations are brought home, or closer together, in the web of kinship relations. The way he describes it, the term refers specifically to the way that kinship is brought closer together as families widen: for example, if a Cree woman's sister becomes a grandmother, that woman would also refer to the child as *nôsisim*, "my grandchild." On a few occasions, I have heard Elder Jerry Saddleback suggest that Cree is a very compassionate language, and you can hear this compassion in Cree kinship terms. These endearing diminutives (such as *nikâwîs*, "my little mother") and intimate terms (such as *nôsisim*, "my grandchild," as opposed to "my niece's son or daughter") point to the profound love and tenderness that underpin the Cree concept of *wâhkômtowin*.

In his article "Cree Poetic Discourse," Neal McLeod suggests *wâhkômtowin* can be translated into English as a "poetics of empathy," an "embodied, poetic understanding of the world" (94). He goes on to explain that "through relations, we are able to create the web of understanding of our embodied locations, and extend it to a wider context of collective historicity" (94). McLeod's ideas here are illustrated by Elder Frank McIntyre's description and lived experience of the way his great-grandfathers' voices can be heard echoing across the land. He recalls how, as a boy, he and his father sang a thanksgiving song when they were out on the land:

So he starts singing and I start repeating his song with him and he would tell me to stop. So we would stop, now listen to our grandfathers and great-grandfathers. You can hear them singing with us. In every hill around us you could hear the echo, even further, now you hear that? We are not the first persons in this country. They were our forefathers, our great-grandfathers that were here. I could

hear all the echo around us and . . . the spirit of our great grandfathers [*sic*] . . . supporting us. (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 12)

In this way, Louise Halfe's book is a lot like that song that the Elder sang with his father. By singing this song and by writing this poetry, Halfe connects the stories of ê-kwêskît and her siblings to the stories of their mother, their grandmothers, and their great-grandmothers, stretching back to time immemorial by connecting these lived experiences to those of Rolling Head, a woman who plays an important role in the Cree creation story.

By connecting ê-kwêskît's lived experience and personal narrative to an âtayôhkêwin (sacred story), Halfe illustrates how the concept of wâhkôhtowin is spiritual and is not limited to human-to-human relationships. As McAdam and others have pointed out, wâhkôhtowin is a Cree law that governs not only human relationships and blood kinship but also human beings' relationships to the rest of the beings in creation. Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt suggest that wâhkôhtowin is actually a doctrine that informs the "laws governing all relations" (14). Elder George Brereton explains in the short film *Wahkohtowin: The Relationship Between Cree People and Natural Law* that

when we talk about wâhkôhtowin, you know it's that we're related. The Creator had created this universe and everything, and that universe relates to us, wâhkôm'koy'ah. We don't relate to it they relate to us. And as we are on this earth we are related to everything that's in creation—the trees, everything, the grass, the rock, everything. It's part of the earth, just like we are. The earth provides for us, today we call it the Mother Earth, she provides everything for us.¹⁷

This ties into how McAdam outlines Indigenous people's reciprocal relationships with the land and their responsibilities to her:

Tobacco is also offered when a First Nations' [*sic*] person takes medicines, plants, stones or other such items from the earth. Every time you pull a plant from Mother Earth, she feels that pull, and you must always make the proper offerings of tobacco and prayers. By offering tobacco in gratitude and thankfulness, you are ensuring that this pulling of Mother Earth's hair will not hurt her too much. She must understand that you comprehend your rela-

tionship to her and that you know what she is giving you is one of the parts of her body. Through honouring and understanding that relationship to Mother Earth, you also honour and understand your reciprocal relationship to all of life and creation. (*Cultural* 17)

Honoring and understanding wâhkôhtowin is a central concept in the nêhiyaw worldview, and it is a foundational concept in Halfe's book. In a comment about the title of her book, Halfe explains, "wâhkôhtowin is our crooked good, and in essence we walk this path in a crooked, bent-over manner, holding hands with every stranger that we meet" ("Green Earth"). The word wâhkôhtowin (even though the standardized spelling and linguistic history of the word might not support this) echoes the morpheme wâk(i) (bent or curved), ohte (movement over land), and ito, which suggests reciprocity.¹⁸ Finally, -win is a nominalizer. In this way, Halfe hears the echoes of these other Cree morphemes in the word, which makes it sound like the concept of walking together, a reciprocal walk, which is bent or curved. Halfe's imagery here brings to mind the way bodies bend when picking medicines from the earth, the way bodies bend when praying and braiding sweetgrass, or the way bodies bend when entering a sweat lodge and how these ceremonies remind participants of (and help them to honor and understand) their relationships—wâhkôhtowin.

This image of journeying together, holding hands with every stranger that we meet, also brings to mind pîcîcîwin, a round dance. In the poem "Round Dance," ê-kwêskî't's elderly mother, aspin, criticizes the community for forgetting the responsibilities that go along with kinship ties. She exclaims that "wâhkôhtowin was a mess, Men donated bastards, / left their seeds homeless, penniless. Father's Day is a mess" (115), and she criticizes some of the men in her family for forgetting what the âtayôhkewina (sacred stories) teach them about wâhkôhtowin:

*Your uncles say we don't come from animals—they've
forgotten wîsahkêcâhk, his shifty ways. Wolf boy—mahihkan.
They don't know nothin'. Pretend they have mamâhtâwisiwin—
special powers. (116)*

Thus, in the text, this dance brings the community together, but aspin's and ê-kwêskî't's words also bring criticism and remind readers about broken relationships and unfulfilled obligations. The honesty and humor in this poem elicit the idea that something can be both crooked and good:

a dance or a journey that is not perfect—and is indeed marked by flaws and deep wounds—but in acknowledging this, the ceremony is good.

Reuben told us that the word *pîcîcîwin* (round dance) comes from *micihciy* (hand) and means to “bring your hand in.” “What they mean,” Reuben told our class, is that you “clasp hands with the person next to you, and then you use your body. . . . One leg is going to the beat of the drum, the other one is dragging on the ground so that what you’re doing is using your body as a communication device to the Ethereal, asking Mother Earth to keep her roots healthy and to bring them out in the springtime.” Halfe told me that this dance is also “in honour of the ancestors, those that died before us” (interview). In this way, this dance, this ceremony, embodies *wâhkôhtowin*; here participants honor and understand their relationships with each other, those that are living, as well as those who have passed on. In asking Mother Earth to keep her roots healthy and to bring them out in the springtime, dancers are reminded of futurity and of the generations of children yet to come, so that *pîcîcîwin* is linked to McAdam’s translation of *wâhkôhtowin* as “generation,” relating to creation and birth, as well as to generations both past and future. At the same time, Reuben’s teaching about *pîcîcîwin* prompts consideration of our relationship with the earth, the roots that are hidden there, and our reliance on them.

kwêskîtân, let’s turn around. Returning to where we began, we can now see that the two words for Rib Woman, *wâkinokwân* and *matotîsân*, work as word bundles, because bundled up with these words are the concepts behind them and the other Cree words that they evoke. Together the two work to point to foundational knowledge upon which the book is built. By paying close attention to the *nêhiyaw itwêwina* in *The Crooked Good*, we can begin to see how those words—and the story they help to narrate—are deeply connected to ceremonies, sacred stories, and Cree laws. These words are powerful; Neal McLeod uses the term “word arrows” (with a nod to Gerald Vizenor) to get at *nêhiyaw itwêwina*’s potential to inspire change and resist colonization. He asserts that “[w]ord-arrows have transformative power and can help Indigenous people come home. They help to establish a new discursive space. Every time a story is told, every time one word of an Indigenous language is spoken, we are resisting the destruction of our collective memory” (*Cree Narrative Memory* 67). By getting to know some of the layers of these Cree words, I have also grown to respect and care for my Cree language

teachers and the knowledge, ceremonies, and stories they have shared with me. Thus this reading of *The Crooked Good* has become something like a literary critical pîcîcîwin, a dance where I clasp hands with these mentors and with strangers whom I have met, and I begin to read and move in a way that tries to honor all of these relationships.

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NOTES

1. When writing in nêhiyawêwin (the Plains Cree language), I do not capitalize any letters. Not using capital letters is a convention of SRO (Standard Roman Orthography, as outlined in *How to Spell it in Cree [The Standard Roman Orthography]*) that has been developed by Plains Cree educators (including Freda Ahenakew, Jean Okimâsis, Ida McLeod, and Arok Wolvengrey, among others) and adopted by authors (including Louise Halfe in *The Crooked Good*), and I follow in their footsteps. There are many reasons for not using capital letters when writing in nêhiyawêwin. For example, in a Facebook discussion Wolvengrey asserts that “Elders have spoken in favor of the lack of capitalization since it can imply hierarchicalization while its lack implies egalitarianism.” In *How to Spell it in Cree* he also reminds language learners that “the English conventions of capitalization are neither universal nor essential” (Okimâsis and Wolvengrey 5). In the Facebook discussion he goes on to suggest that refusing to follow the rules for capitalization in English when writing in Cree decolonizes the language. I also do not italicize Cree words (unless I am directly quoting a source that does), and I make this choice for similar reasons. Although many bilingual Cree texts (including *The Crooked Good*) italicize Cree words, Neal McLeod (and others, including Métis poet Gregory Scofield) is moving away from this. In his Cree literature class, Neal McLeod told me not to italicize the Cree words in my writing. On a poetic level, he suggested that by not italicizing these words, you force the reader to experience how these words interact with the words around them. On a political level, editors have told me that “conventionally we italicize words and phrases in foreign languages.” Since I see English as a foreign language on Turtle Island generally and in Plains Cree territory in Canada more specifically, especially in relation to nêhiyaw literature, I now refuse to italicize nêhiyaw itwêwina (Cree words, or more literally, Cree sayings) in my own writing. Finally, there are slight differences in Standard Roman Orthography among Plains Cree writers: some use macrons over long vowels (â, ê, î, ô), while others use a circumflex (ê, â, î, ô); they are equivalent. Additionally, some writers mark the long e, while others do not; however, readers will notice that Louise Halfe marks her e’s as long. I will follow Halfe’s lead in

this article and use circumflexes on my long vowels and mark the long *e*'s. Note also the Cree language material was edited by Jean Okimâsis (whose "careful work on the Cree language" Halfe acknowledges on page 134).

2. I wish to acknowledge Neal McLeod's domestic violence and related criminal charge, as well as the recent open letter six female Indigenous authors wrote that drew attention to it. Their open letter has given me a lot to think about, and I appreciate their courage in speaking out against violence against women and drawing attention to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S) and survivors of assault. *The Crooked Good* speaks to the legacies of colonial and gendered violence, and I have decided to keep the references to Neal McLeod's work in this article; I made this choice because I believe including his work is in keeping with the complicated, multilayered, and crooked nature of the narrative itself.

3. See also Mareike Neuhaus's discussion of "relational word bundles" in *The Decolonizing Poetics of Indigenous Literatures*, where she defines "relational word bundles as figures of speech that perform a significant narrative function and, combined with other such figures, constitute the narrative grid of a given story" (17). My use of the term "word bundle" is different: I am interested in looking at the *nêhiyaw itwêwina* as bundles because of their layered meanings and their connection to *nêhiyaw* histories, sacred stories, ceremony, laws, and other *nêhiyaw itwêwina*.

4. To point to just a few of the exciting Cree language initiatives in Canada, there are now bilingual Cree language programs available at public elementary schools in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; an immersion program from prekindergarten to grade 12 in Opaskwayak, Manitoba; and degrees such as a bachelor of arts in Cree or a master of arts in Indigenous languages available at University *nuhelot'ine* *thaiyots'į* *nistameyimâkanak* Blue Quills in St. Paul, Alberta. Here in *amiskwaciwâskahikan*, there are adult Cree language courses offered at the University of Alberta, at Yellowhead Tribal College, and through the Centre for Race and Culture (to name just three Cree language programs available in the city).

5. I use the word *mystery* here to echo Louise Halfe's discussion of the powerful way that the sacred story of the Rolling Head continues to live in the audience's "imagination and puzzle those attempting to unravel her mystery" ("Keynote Address" 73). *The Crooked Good* is, in part, her effort "to unravel the story's philosophy, its psychology and spirituality in [her] language" (*ibid*).

6. The dash in her name is not consistent within the text. For example, on page 2 there is no dash, but on page 3 there is. Since I later quote page 2 I left the dash out to be consistent within the article.

7. See Wolvengrey's entry for *kwêskîw* in *nêhiyawêwin: itwêwina*, vol. 1, Cree-English.

8. *nêhiyawêwin* has two distinct verbal inflectional paradigms or modes: the independent and the conjunct. At the University of Alberta I was taught that the independent mode is "used in a sentence to make a declarative statement. This statement has a subject and a verb and is a complete sentence. Example: I work today. *nitatokân anohc*" (Hunter and Karpinski 42). In contrast, I was taught that the

conjunct mode “demonstrates a progressive action” and is “denoted by the suffix -ing in English” (43). Example: I am working today. êhatoskeyân anohc. H. Christoph Wolfart and Janet F. Carroll suggest that the conjunct mode “consists of forms that usually occur in dependent clauses” (41–42).

9. Mareike Neuhaus uses the linguistic term *holophrase* to describe these sorts of one-word sentences or clauses. See her two monographs for more on this, particularly on how this concept can be applied to Indigenous literatures written in English (which, she demonstrates, often bear the traces of Indigenous languages through holophrastic constructions in English).

10. Compare this name to those of her parents, aspin and wâpistikwân, or her siblings, Three Person, Mechanic, ospwâkan, and wâpan.

11. At the end of her acknowledgments, Halfe tells her readers, “I offer this story as a way to go inward, so that one may go forward perhaps a little more intact” (*Crooked Good* 135).

12. A discussion of cihcipistikwân-âtayôhkêwin (the sacred story of the Rolling Head) is beyond the scope of this article. It is also a sacred story that some nêhiyawak warn should only be told or discussed in certain seasons and in conjunction with certain ceremonies, so I hesitate to analyze it in any detail in a published text. However, Leslie Belleau, an author and literary scholar from the Ojibwe nation of Garden River, has published an article, “Stretching through Our Watery Sleep: Feminine Narrative Retrieval of cihcipistikwân in Louise Halfe’s *The Crooked Good*,” where she examines Halfe’s treatment of this âtayôhkêwin. Louise Halfe also discusses cihcipistikwân in “Keynote Address.”

13. Reuben Quinn, a nêhiyaw language teacher and ceremonial lodge keeper from onihcikiskwapiwinihk, Saddle Lake (Louise Halfe is also from there), teaches nêhiyawêwin and syllabics through the star chart. I learned to read and write in syllabics from him, and he in turn learned the star chart from four Elders who came to teach the students at Blue Quills Residential School after it was liberated in 1971.

14. The image is an ink drawing called *Snake Woman* by multimedia artist Paul Lapointe.

15. The first word is the more common word, and, unlike wâkinokwân, it can be found in several dictionaries; see, for instance, Wolvengrey’s entry.

16. mâto is the singular imperative, or a command said to one person.

17. I surmise that wâhkôm’koy’ah, written without the Elder’s elision, would probably be (ê-)wâhkômikoyahk, “(as) she relates to us, as she is related to us.” The -ikoyahk ending on this verb tells the listener that the Elder is referring to the universe or creation as a third person, relating to the first-person inclusive (us, including the listener). Thank you to Arok Wolvengrey for helping me with this word. It is interesting to note the similarities between the Elder’s comments on wâhkôtowin here and Daniel Heath Justice’s discussion of kinship in “Go Away Water!/: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative,” where he states, “While the land herself is of central concern to most indigenous epistemologies, we don’t know her outside of our relationship(s) to her (or to the other peoples who depend on her for survival). We often call her Mother; we—like the Animal-people and Tree-people—are her

kindred, and ours is a relationship of reciprocity. She gives life and sustenance to us, we (ideally) give her respect, honour, and care" (162). Unfortunately, an in-depth analysis of Justice's work as it relates to the Cree concept and teachings surrounding wáhkôtowin is beyond the scope of this article.

18. *ohte* is heard, for instance, in *pimohte*, which means "movement by land," "walking." The *pim-* morpheme suggests movement, and the *-ohte* suggests movement over land, or a walking movement. Thank you to Reuben Quinn for teaching me some of the layers of this word.

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“The Unkillable Mother”

Sovereignty and Survivance in Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House*

MARY PANICCIA CARDEN

Rape is more than a metaphor for colonization—it is part and parcel of colonization. . . . Sexual assault mimics the worst traits of colonization in its attack on the body, invasion of physical boundaries, and disregard for humanity. . . . The perpetrators of sexual assault and colonization thrive on power and control over their victims. The U.S. government, as a perpetrator of colonization, has attempted to assert long-lasting control over land and people—usurping governments, spirituality, and identity.

Sarah Deer, “Decolonizing Rape Law”

In her afterword to *The Round House*, Louise Erdrich explains that she based the novel’s events on “different cases, reports, and stories” involving the mind-boggling number of Native American women victimized by rape (321). She cites an Amnesty International report that found that “1 in 3 Native women will be raped in her lifetime (and that figure is certainly higher as Native women often do not report rape); 86 percent of rapes and sexual assaults upon Native women are perpetrated by non-Native men; few are prosecuted” (319).¹ Accepting the 2012 National Book Award for *The Round House*, Erdrich praised “the grace and endurance of Native women” and described her novel as “a book about a huge case of injustice ongoing on reservations.” She added, “Thank you for giving it a wider audience” (qtd. in Chilton). *The Round House* explicitly positions a fictional rape as representative of “most Indian rape cases,” which never go “to trial for one reason or another” (41). Less explicitly, but no less forcefully, Erdrich also constructs an intricate, layered web of associations around women and motherhood that aligns the implications of the 1988 rape of Geraldine Coutts and the events that follow with Ojibwe

history and with possibilities for tribal futures. As narrated by Geraldine's son Joe, the rape and its aftermath become emblematic of the state and status of Ojibwe culture.

The off-stage attack on Geraldine Coutts sets *The Round House*'s plot in motion, and the novel's predominant themes circulate around mother figures. Geraldine's attempt to protect another mother and her infant daughter leads to her violent confrontation with Linden Lark, the bigoted and quite possibly sociopathic white man who rapes and beats her; she narrowly escapes being burned alive and requires surgery to repair her injuries. The other mother, Mayla Wolfskin, seems to have been the victim of statutory rape. Lark kidnaps, brutalizes, and murders Mayla (also off-stage) and attempts to profit from her death by engineering her daughter's adoption by her powerful white father. None of these crimes are prosecuted.

As the title of the novel implies, it is significant that Linden Lark's crimes against Native women take place in and around the round house, an aged community gathering place and "symbol of communal love and justice" (Matchie 354) located on the fictional North Dakota reservation on which many of Erdrich's novels are set. Once the site of sacred Ojibwe ceremonies, the round house stands as the crux, the meeting place, of the novel's symbolic associations. A womb-like "log hexagon," the round house represents and embodies a cultural mother figure, Buffalo Woman, the "old grandmother buffalo" who saved tribal healer/trickster Nanapush, his mother, and his community by giving herself for food in the starving time that came with the establishment of the reservation (Erdrich, *Round House* 59, 187).² Later, "the spirit of the old female buffalo" planted a vision of the round house in Nanapush's mind and articulated its significance:

Your people were brought together by us buffalo once. You knew how to hunt and use us. Your clans gave you laws. You had many rules by which you operated. Rules that respected us and forced you to work together. Now we are gone, but as you have once sheltered in my body, so now you understand. The round house will be my body, the poles my ribs, the fire my heart. It will be the body of your mother and it must be respected the same way. As the mother is intent on her baby's life, so your people should think of their children. (214–15)

As “[their] mother,” Buffalo Woman acts as protector and nurturer of cultural heritage and as a bridge between the Ojibwe of the time when buffalo “covered the earth” (184) and the Ojibwe living within the U.S. reservation system. With her gift of the round house, Buffalo Woman provides both the impetus and the means for cultural continuance.

This gift comes at a pivotal moment for Joe’s ancestors, as the relentless U.S. settler-colonialist project of indigenous dispossession and containment reached grim fruition in the late nineteenth century. In the decades that followed, the round house served as a bulwark against systemic cultural, political, religious, and economic repression. Beyond authorizing and enacting various forms of “frontier homicide,” historian Patrick Wolfe observes, the U.S. government appropriated Native lands, intruded on Native communities, and chipped away at Native sovereignty through “officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations” (“Settler Colonialism” 388). Forcing the Ojibwe onto reservations, depriving them of life-sustaining resources, and restricting the religious practices that nourish clan and community, agents and institutions of settler colonialism sought nothing less than “to terminate their existence as [a] peopl[e]” (Dunbar-Ortiz 6). In *The Round House*, Erdrich’s treatment of Geraldine Coutts’s rape demonstrates that this colonial “logic of elimination continues into the present” (Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism” 393) and that it deliberately undercuts Native futures by attacking women and mothers. But the associative links Erdrich draws between Geraldine Coutts and Buffalo Woman simultaneously demonstrate that Native resistance to the deadly logic of colonial domination also continues into the present, promising to preserve, strengthen, and extend the cultural sovereignty of tribal nations.

Because Buffalo Woman’s story, as told by Joe’s grandfather Mooshum, is central to the novel’s themes and messages, I will summarize it here. It goes like this: Nanapush’s mother, Akiikwe, or “Earth Woman,” once an “ordinary woman,” developed the ability to “make out in dreams where to find . . . animals.” This capacity enabled Akiikwe and her husband, Mirage, to feed their children until the tribe was “forced . . . into [their] boundary” during “the reservation year” (Erdrich, *Round House* 179).

When the fish retreated for the winter and Akiikwe could no longer find food, Mirage grew "tired" of her. He persuaded a group of men that she had turned wiindigoo, or been possessed by a spirit that causes people to "see fellow human beings as prey meat" (180). Since tribal practice stipulated that only "blood family" could kill a wiindigoo, the men gave Akiikwe's twelve-year-old son, Nanapush, a knife and ordered him to do the deed. He refused, as "she was a good mother to her children and had taught them how to live" (180, 181). After surviving three attempts to kill her, culminating in submersion in a frozen lake, Akiikwe emerged to teach her son a "hunting song," a "buffalo song" given to her by the fish, who, "like all the animals," missed the buffalo and missed "the real Anishinaabeg too" (182). Nanapush's mother then sent him, fortified with this song, to find a lone buffalo, an "old woman" who had "come back" from over the western horizon (182–83).

When the old buffalo heard Nanapush's hunting song, she met his gaze with "a depth of sorrow that shook [him] even in his desperation" before "allow[ing] him to aim point-blank at her heart" (185). After consuming pieces of her heart and liver, Nanapush sheltered from a raging snowstorm by crawling into her body. Overcome with exhaustion, he fell unconscious and froze against the buffalo's ribs; Nanapush "became" himself "a buffalo," and the old woman buffalo "adopted [him] and told him all she knew" (186). Joe's grandfather concludes:

Many people were saved by that old woman buffalo, who gave herself to Nanapush and his unkillable mother. Nanapush himself said that whenever he was sad over the losses that came over and over through his life, his old grandmother buffalo would speak to him and comfort him. The buffalo knew what had happened to Nanapush's mother. She said wiindigoo justice must be pursued with great care. A place should be built so that people could do things in a good way. (187)

The round house was constructed according to the instructions Buffalo Woman gave Nanapush, and "during the old days when Indians could not practice their religion" (59) it served as a primary site of cultural and spiritual expression.³

Sheltered in "the body of [their] mother," the people brought out ceremonial objects banned by the U.S. government—"the water drums and eagle feathers and the medicine bags and birchbark scrolls and sacred

pipes”—which would quickly disappear when “the priest or the BIA superintendent arrived,” replaced with people square dancing or engaging in Bible study (60). In the round house, the Ojibwe maintained their cultural rituals and also created new, cross-cultural practices; their “highest Mide’ priest,” according to Mooshum, “was a damn fine” square dance caller, and at times the “old Catholic priest” would “sit down with the medicine people” (60). In these respects, the round house functions as a site of Native survivance, a concept Ojibwe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor uses to indicate modes and means of survival that result in something more than simply or only basic bodily subsistence.

At best, “survival” signifies endurance and perseverance; at worst, it carries connotations of extremity and desperation, a precarious hanging on in the face of annihilation. “Survivance,” on the other hand, exceeds “mere reaction” to colonial invasion and deprivation; “practices of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence” (Vizenor, “Aesthetics” 1, 11). Since the “suffix *ance* is a quality of action” (19), survivance endows survival with power, purpose, and agency. In Vizenor’s conceptualization, survivance constitutes a creative stance expressed in practices that improvise on colonial circumstances to cultivate and advance tribal identities and tribal futures. Karl Kroeber suggests that survivance produces “modes of personal and social renewal attained through welcoming unpredictable cultural reorientations” that serve to diminish “the power of the destroyer” (25). Native survivance resists settler-colonialist domination and refutes historical pastness in stories, traditions, and customs that affirm cultural sovereignty. Survivance challenges U.S. histories organized around winner/loser binaries, triumphalist national narratives in which Indians are vanquished and vanishing.⁴

The narrative structure of *The Round House* foregrounds principles of survivance through the “continuance of stories” that “tease traditions and memories” (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 1, 5). Even though, as Buffalo Woman remarks, the buffalo and the ways of life indigenous people built around them are gone, both remain in the narrative tracks and traces (“teases” of tradition) conveyed to Mooshum by Nanapush, who sheltered in Buffalo Woman’s body and so understands her message. Mooshum transmits these tracks and traces to Joe, enabling his grandson to “see a part of something larger, an idea, a truth, but just a fragment . . . just a shadow of that way of life” (Erdrich, *Round House* 215).

As Joe retells the Buffalo Woman story as part of his mother's story, he deploys these fragments and shadows to track the cultural and historical implications of the crime against Geraldine.

That the round house is the site of brutal, dehumanizing violence against Ojibwe women in the late twentieth century graphically illustrates settler colonialism's continuing threat to Ojibwe sovereignty and to the priorities articulated by Buffalo Woman at the beginning of the reservation era—respect for the mother and, "in the same way," for the integrity of Ojibwe culture. As Seema Kurup and Linda Wagner-Martin observe, "By physically and psychologically torturing" Geraldine in the round house, Linden Lark "denigrate[s] the entire Ojibwe community" (67). Early in the novel, Joe associates this symbol of Ojibwe tradition with the body of his own mother, remembering that as his thirteen-year-old self approached the site of Geraldine's rape, he heard "a low moan of air" pass through "the cracks in the silvery logs of the round house," a "grieving cry" that "seemed emitted by the structure itself" (Erdrich, *Round House* 59). The "old ceremonial place," he concludes, had "cried out" to him in his mother's "anguished voice" (60). Late in the novel, Joe describes the round house as "the sleeping woman, the unkillable mother, the old lady buffalo" (315), drawing together threads of his narrative that tie violations of individual Ojibwe women to violations of Ojibwe sovereignty. Throughout the novel, the call for respect for "the body of your mother" applies not only to Buffalo Woman and to the round house but also to Geraldine Coutts and to the whole of Ojibwe culture—past, present, and future.

The novel's linkage of mothers with Ojibwe culture is reinforced by Joe's tendency to associate mothers with nourishment and with cultural caretaking—the redemptive functions performed by Buffalo Woman and by Akiikwe / Earth Woman. Joe's own mother "had always liked to feed" Joe and his friends—Cappy, Angus, and Zach—and after her rape she convinces Joe to return to school by promising "when she was better, she would make [them] a cake . . . and sloppy joes" (17). The thirteen-year-old Joe becomes more aware of the depth of Geraldine's trauma when she turns away from her family's dinner "ritual" and withdraws "to a place of utter loneliness from which she might never be retrieved" (43).

Suffering alone in the dark silence of her bedroom, Geraldine leaves undone her duties as tribal enrollment specialist. In this role, she serves as caretaker of Ojibwe identity, guardian and interpreter of records

that go back to the reservation's "original census rolls" and include "a description of each family by tribe, often by clan, by occupation, by relationship, age, and original name" in the Anishinaabe language (149). Joe views his mother's inability to eat, her absence from the enrollment office, and her retreat to the oblivion of sleep as evidence the rape has "nearly severed" her "spirit from her body" (45). It is only when Geraldine realizes Mayla Wolfskin's infant daughter once again needs her protection that she is able to "overcome" her rapist's "threats" (164) and leave her bedroom. Taking action to preserve her community, "the sleeping woman" and "unkillable mother" rouses from her exile and reclaims her familial and tribal roles.

Meals, nourishment, and food figure prominently in Joe's narrative well beyond his own household; he offers frequent descriptions of specific dishes down to their individual ingredients and accompanies these accounts with detailed information about the women who prepare and provide them. In other contexts, readers might find this association of women and caretaking clichéd and reductive. In *The Round House*, however, it serves to connect contemporary Ojibwe women to Buffalo Woman and to recall the importance of mothers in Ojibwe tradition, in which, Hertha Wong explains, the "mother is not merely one's biological parent; she is all one's relations (male and female, human and animal, individual and tribal)" (177).

Wong points out that Native women have long "been associated with the continuance of tribal tradition, both through childbearing and through transmission of cultural values" (174). In Erdrich's novels, Wong argues, "women, and mothers in particular," bear the "responsibility of family/clan relationships which, though often troubled, sustain both individual and community" (177). Linking mothers and cultural continuance, Erdrich shares in a literary and cultural priority Paula Gunn Allen describes as recovery of the feminine in American Indian traditions. Allen has examined "woman-centered social system[s]" in a number of Native cultures, where maternal figures with titles such as Earth Woman, Buffalo Woman, Corn Woman, Thought Woman, Spider Woman, and Sky Woman function as world creators and "quintessential" world spirits (*Sacred Hoop* 2, 13). They provide various and diverse Native peoples with material and spiritual foundations for existence; they bless "the people with the ability to provide for themselves and their progeny," inspire religious and social practices, and organize familial and cultural

relationships (15). Allen contrasts these woman-centered values with the "Western concepts of social order" underwriting colonialism, noting that the "civilized" belief that the strong must prevail over the weak, the superior over the inferior, the violent over the peaceful, and the order of patriarchy over all, leads inexorably to rape" (*Off the Reservation* 66). Native societies, on the other hand, honor "matrilineal, matrilineal, and matrifocal" traditions in which "God is a Woman" and origins—"the single cell, be it plant or animal"—are recognized "as 'mother'" (89, 90).

In *The Round House*, Joe's discussions of women, food, and nourishment emphasize mothers' sustaining and connective functions. For him, food—the preparation and consumption of meals—seems to constitute its own language, one that references relationships and histories and traces out webs of community, affiliation, and continuity. Eating potato salad provided by his friend Cappy, "the kind with mustard in the mayonnaise and pickles and eggs," Joe recognizes that his own mother "made it that way" and concludes, "Cappy's aunts must have made the salad" (Erdrich, *Round House* 98). Exhausted and ravenous after searching for evidence at the site of Geraldine's rape and unable to perform their customary "raid mission" on her kitchen (70), Joe and his friends seek out Ignatia Thunder, Zack's grandmother. Joe views "Grandma Thunder," a "medicine person" (308) and part of a network of elders who parent the reservation community, as a source of replenishment and renewal; the smell of meat and onions cooking on her stove, he reports, has "a wonderful power" (72). Throughout the novel, women, including Joe's and Cappy's aunts, habitually feed the group of friends, perpetuating a culture of hospitality and strengthening its communal ethos in another generation.⁵

Joe associates Cappy's aunts with both food and tradition. Suzette and Josey supply feasts for sweat lodge ceremonies, make powwow regalia for themselves and others, and "[know] how to feed boys" (277). The sisters dance "women's traditional" (272), and Joe marvels that "their beaded yokes and the tanned hides, the bone breastplates and the woolen shawls, the heavy silver concho belts and figured ornaments and . . . long leather fringe must have weighed sixty pounds or more." But Joe further observes that because Suzette and Josey are "phenomenally strong," they "move with dignity under the weight of all [that] tradition" (274). This capacity—the strength to bear the weight, or "the gut-kick," of Ojibwe history (100) with grace and dignity—conveys in a

nutshell the state of being Joe and other characters in *The Round House* (and in Erdrich's reservation novels as a whole) hope to achieve, the state of being most likely to extend tribal identity into a viable future.

During the days in which Geraldine finds herself unable to eat and "come back to life" (88) after her rape and near immolation, her sister Clemence provides meals for Joe and his father, tribal judge Antone Basil Coutts, called Basil. After Joe and Basil fight with Geraldine's rapist in the grocery store, Joe pummeling him with cans of tomatoes, Joe suspects Clemence opened those cans and "added them to the chili" she prepared for her sister and her family (249), a gesture imbued with humor, practicality, and strength—with, in other words, fundamental components of survivance. Clemence has raised two children (one of them a narrator of Erdrich's 2008 novel, *The Plague of Doves*) and acts as caretaker of her father, Joe's grandfather Mooshum, who is well over one hundred years old and himself a primary caretaker of tribal knowledge and history. Recounting Nanapush's Buffalo Woman story as he talks in his sleep, Mooshum provides Joe with historical and cultural perspectives on the round house and on the importance of mothers in tribal survival.

In addition to connecting Geraldine and Buffalo Woman to the round house and to each other, the novel also constructs a number of other connections, both overt and implied, between these two maternal figures. Repeated references to Geraldine's family history recapitulate the larger movements of Anishinaabe history in which Buffalo Woman intervenes. Joe emphasizes Geraldine's father's Métis/Michif (Ojibwe and French) heritage, reporting that his family "came down over the border" from Canada following the hanging of Louis Riel (201, 202). In North Dakota, having been taken in by an Anishinaabe chief, Mooshum gradually "cast off his Michif ways," first rejecting Catholicism, then "speaking pure Chippewa not mixed with French" (201, 202). Mentions of Mooshum's background and life trajectory align his family with wider patterns of indigenous migration and cultural contact; as Kenneth Roemer explains, in the "late eighteenth century . . . bands of Eastern Anishinaabeg migrated to what is now North Dakota," where they "encountered Métis people" and later intermarried with Anglo-Europeans (117). Like many Ojibwe children, Mooshum's daughters returned to live on the reservation after attending boarding school. And, having married a man of Ojibwe/European descent, Geraldine gave

birth to a son, whose unexpected appearance in his parents' older age gives his family "life" and hope for renewal (Erdrich, *Round House* 93).

Beyond areas of coincidence based in historical background and nurturing/caretaking roles, Geraldine further shares with Buffalo Woman her knowledge of and respect for Ojibwe clan relationships. As tribal enrollment specialist, Geraldine researches lines of descent on behalf of "children returning as adults, adopted-out people cut off from their tribe, basically stolen by state welfare agencies," as well as children of parents "who had given up on being . . . Indian" but "longed" themselves for "connection" (212). Even when "pars[ing]" blood quantum and dealing with "genealogy hopefuls curious about their possible romantic Indian Princess grandmothers" (212), Geraldine facilitates the reknitting of clans.

Her work reinstating and extending clan relationships offers potential for renewal of the traditional heart of Ojibwe familial, social, and cultural structures. Organized around an ancestral totem or "doodem," clans traditionally "functioned to convey identity" and to bind communities together through "ties of kinship" (Miller 38). "At one time," Basil reminds his family, clan affiliation "meant everything," signifying an individual's "place in the world and . . . relationship to all other beings" (Erdrich, *Round House* 154). Clan associations remain important to the extended Coutts family, indicative of "the eternal tease of totemic consciousness" that constitutes an element of Native survivance (Vizenor, *Native* 6).⁶ Geraldine's tribal enrollment efforts strengthen possibilities for "totemic consciousness" and draw unrecognized clan members into tribal community, fulfilling Buffalo Woman's admonition that the reservation-bound Ojibwe "think of their children" rather than acquiesce to the colonialist logic of elimination, with its expectation that Native peoples will inevitably diminish and disappear.

Although these linkages between Geraldine Coutts and Buffalo Woman suggest the vitality of traditional routes of Ojibwe survivance, in the context of Geraldine's rape they also highlight the distance between the careful administration of Anishinaabe justice urged by Buffalo Woman and the contemporary legal system in which Geraldine's case becomes mired. Buffalo Woman reminded the Ojibwe of Nanapush's time "how to live" by reminding them of the inter- and intraclan rules that constituted "the first system of Ojibwe law" (Erdrich, *Round House* 154) and by giving them a place in which to administer justice "in a

good way,” but the round house is no longer used for this purpose and clan-related rules no longer have precedence. Instead, the Ojibwe must reckon with a legal structure that has imposed matters of land title as the defining standard of justice, stranding Native peoples in a labyrinth of reservation-related laws, policies, court cases, and jurisdictional claims that maintain settler domination.

As tribal judge, Joe’s father negotiates a legal system that actively undermines Native sovereignty, a system that cloaks “the violence of dispossession in the language of legal formality” (Wolfe, “Against” 6). This rhetorical sleight of hand, Wolfe argues, channels “political contestation into the domain of law” and “maintain[s] the ideological misrepresentation of Indian dispossession into the present” (7). Discussing the Coutts family’s legal predicament with Joe, Bazil points to a 1978 U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Oliphant v. Suquamish*) that denies Indians “the right to prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes” on reservations (Erdrich, *Round House* 229). The novel’s presentation of this case (and related cases) indicts the U.S. justice system as a “colonial temporality” that permits only “limited actions within a colonial moment against colonial structures” (Tuck and Yang 6–7).⁷ These enduring colonial structures were erected on “the centuries old doctrine of discovery,” which historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz describes as “legal cover for theft” (198). The doctrine of discovery, which was established in “a series of late-fifteenth-century papal bulls” (3), granted the European power whose representatives first set eyes on new world spaces unqualified title and dominion over them, entirely without regard to the presence of indigenous peoples.

As successor of those European powers, the U.S. government explicitly evoked the doctrine of discovery to justify the new nation’s colonial aggression (Dunbar-Ortiz 3). Discovery was formally upheld as law in the early nineteenth century with the Supreme Court ruling *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), which stripped “away all Indian title to all lands viewed—i.e. ‘discovered’—by Europeans,” nullifying Native claims to their homelands and leaving them with “nothing more than the right of occupancy, a right that could be taken away at any time” (Erdrich, *Round House* 228, 229). As a direct result, Dunbar-Ortiz observes, Native societies and cultures were “devastated” as their lands were transformed “into private property, real estate.” And, “arcane as it may seem,” the doctrine of discovery “remains the basis for federal

laws still in effect that control Indigenous peoples' lives and destinies" (198). In *The Round House*, characters' evaluations of federal Indian law emphasize its formative role in the uneven colonial relationship between tribal nations and the U.S. government that continues "even to this day" (229).

Johnson v. McIntosh and subsequent decisions upholding federal jurisdiction over the disposition of Indian lands have facilitated the ongoing fracture of reservation geographies into checkerboards of different classes of land (including allotment, fee, fractionated, trust, restricted, individual Indian, non-Indian, federal, state, and tribal), spaces owned and administered by different (and often competing) entities. Therefore, in addition to determining who raped Geraldine ("an Indian or a non-Indian"), investigators must take into account "where the crime had been committed" (12). Because "three classes of land meet" at the round house (160), the exact spot of Geraldine's rape must be identified so that a determination may be made about the authorities responsible for seeing justice done. But Linden Lark put a sack over Geraldine's head when he attacked her, so she cannot be certain precisely on whose land the crime occurred. This lack of "clear jurisdiction" (196) trumps all other considerations, including Geraldine's identification of Lark as her assailant, resulting in his release to continue menacing both his victim and the larger reservation community.

Erdrich has asserted that "sexual predators" who target Native women "know that reservations are jurisdictionally complicated, and so they can basically commit crimes with impunity" (qtd. in Nance 52). She seems to have created Linden Lark as a composite of this class of deliberate predator. "I won't get caught," he boasts to Geraldine. "I've been boning up on law" (Erdrich, *Round House* 161). Erdrich makes Lark the face of the present "injustice ongoing on reservations" and of the long-standing project of Anglo-European conquest that created and continues to preserve the American colonial state. As both product and embodiment of U.S. settler colonialism, Linden Lark exhibits key characteristics of its essentially sociopathic mindset, among them easy dehumanization of others, capacity for unrepentant violence, conviction of superiority, and self-justifying privilege.

Absolutely confident in white Americans' innate superiority to Native Americans, Lark muses aloud to Joe that "a loving family" might enable "even an Indian boy" to "draw even with a white kid . . . [who]

doesn't have a loving family" (171). He seems surprised when Joe takes offense. Lark himself comes from a family deeply ingrained with colonial entitlement, a family composed of "the sort of people who trot out their relationships with 'good Indians,' whom they secretly despise and openly patronize, in order to prove their general love for Indians, whom they are engaged in cheating" (50). These "small-time hypocrites," Basil warns Joe, may "be capable of monstrous acts" (50). Indeed, in addition to Lark's "monstrous" penchant for brutality, a member of his family played a role in the 1911 lynching of three innocent Indians (including a thirteen-year-old boy), chronicled in *The Plague of Doves*.

Though separated by almost a century, *The Round House* presents the lynching and the rape as parallel crimes indicative of colonialist disdain for both the sovereignty of individual Ojibwe people and the sovereignty of the Ojibwe reservation. Linden Lark rapes Geraldine on the grounds of the reservation's round house, and his great-uncle was among a group of Anglo-European men who forcibly removed three Indians charged with no crime from the sanctuary of its church. In *The Plague of Doves*, there is no real expectation of punishment for the men who lynched three innocent Ojibwe; in *The Round House*, Linden Lark is smugly unconcerned about being held accountable for his crimes. Basil speculates that Lark inherited his "contempt" for Native Americans in general and for Ojibwe sovereignty in particular from his ancestor, situating his rape of Geraldine as part of an "old brutality that hadn't yet bled itself out" (211).⁸

Basil's observations about past brutality and current contempt superimpose Linden Lark's violation of Geraldine over the decades-old crime against three members of the reservation community. Lark does the same; as he terrorizes Geraldine and Mayla in the round house, he describes himself as "one of those people who just hates Indians generally and especially for they were at odds with [his] folks way back" (161). In his own version of how history bleeds itself out, Lark holds that reservations should be "dissolved" because whites "beat [Indians] fair and square" (52), insisting that whites (whom he identifies as "the strong") should "rule" Indians (whom he views as "the weak") (161). As spokesperson for the colonial logic of elimination, Lark propagates and performs the triumphalist model of national history that erases Native peoples from U.S. geographies and cultural narratives.

This erasure, however, is belied by Geraldine's continuing enrollment

of new tribal members, by Joe himself, bearer of his family's "surging hopes" for the future (25), and by Mayla's infant daughter, retrieved from the state adoption system and returned to her Ojibwe relatives. Linden Lark's own history reveals additional cracks in structures of American settler-colonialist hegemony. Even though he positions himself as descendant and heir of the "we" who "beat [Indians] fair and square," he has been unable to extend this legacy by "beating" the Indians in his near proximity. Rulings issued by Bazil put an end to the Larks' exploitative business practices on the reservation and "dismissed with prejudice" their "clumsy, greedy, mean-spirited attempt" to take over the land of an Ojibwe family that adopted Linden's sister. In addition to driving Linden into "near bankruptcy," these decisions refute the Larks' "sense of entitlement" (51, 52) and reject their claim to the inherent superiority that for centuries has been used to justify Anglo-European dominion in the Americas.

While history—recent and distant—at least in part explains Linden Lark's resentment of Indians, it does not account for his particular animus toward Native *women*. Preparing to kill Geraldine and Mayla in the round house, to burn them like trash or the "dirt" he insists they are (162), Lark proclaims that he harbors an "especially" strong hatred for "Indian women," who, he claims, "have no standing under the law for a good reason and yet have continued to diminish the white man and to take his honor" (161). Although Lark does not identify the "good reason" that supposedly leaves Native women without *any* legal standing or the means by which he imagines they damage his honor, his exaggerated accusations and justifications hew closely to racist caricatures used to justify the worst, most "monstrous" excesses of American settler colonialism. They also recapitulate a brutal set of historical facts: because Anglo-European settlers viewed Indian women as (in Lark's terms) dirty—lascivious and impure—white men saw them as sexually available and exploitable, and because U.S. authorities viewed Indian women as bearers of future generations that might endanger the settler-colonial national order, they were purposely targeted for elimination (Stannard 123, 125).

Lark's special hatred for Indian women—source of the Native futures supposedly foreclosed by white America's triumph—is clearly a colonial hatred. It is not surprising, then, that his crimes against Mayla and Geraldine enact "the colonial mindset" in which violence and rape "are

deeply embedded” (Deer, “Decolonizing” 150). As “part and parcel of colonization,” Sarah Deer has argued, rape functions both as “a metaphor” of invasion and as its “individualized manifestation” (150, 161). Raping Geraldine Coutts, Lark seeks to satisfy his need not only to use Native people as a kind of reverse mirror reflecting white male power and dominance but to define and control their very Indianness. Lark lured Geraldine to the round house for the purpose of recovering Mayla’s daughter’s tribal enrollment documents; raping her does nothing to secure the documents, but it does disempower and defeat a Native woman, a tribal authority, and the wife of the Ojibwe judge standing in the way of the Lark family’s exploitation of the reservation community. Geraldine exceeds her place in the triumphalist national narrative that Lark relies upon as the foundation of his sense of identity as a white American man; the rape constitutes his attempt to restore the authority of that narrative by forcibly reenacting it on her body.

Similarly, when Lark murders Mayla Wolfskin, he disempowers and defeats a Native girl who rejected him—a white man—and put him in the “awkward position” of unrequited lover by entering into a sexual relationship with another man (Erdrich, *Round House* 161). Mayla further humiliates Lark by refusing to “run away” with him using “the payoff money” the other man gave her “not to talk” (299), and the enrollment documents she filed with Geraldine add insult to injury by naming the other man as Curtis Yeltow, the bigoted South Dakota governor Lark raised money for, allied himself with, and “idolized” (299).⁹ His superiority called into question, Lark tries to “make things the right way around for [him]” (161) by forcing Mayla and Geraldine into the powerless, abject role assigned Native women in the dominant narrative of U.S. history.

Perhaps Lark would have been less affronted by Mayla’s relationship with the governor had he recognized Curtis Yeltow as a compatriot in the same narrative, even as a version of himself—a Linden Lark elevated from “small-time hypocrite” to “highly placed government official” (124). In addition to their willingness to exploit Mayla (a high school intern), the two men have in common their facility in evading accountability for their serially criminal and avaricious actions; neither man has been made to answer for the “bad things” he has done (173). Lark and Yeltow “[share]” racist “views” (52) and behave with colonialist arrogance and hypocrisy in their interactions with Native Americans. Where

Lark patronizes them while bent on cheating them, Yeltow grants Indian internships not to advance the education of Native children but to make his "administration look good" (124). Lark attempts to co-opt Mayla as his "girlfriend" (124) but uses racial slurs to describe Native women (161); Yeltow uses "the prairie nigger word for Indians" while "pay[ing] homage to the noble savage" and "collect[ing] war shields" and "Indian beadwork" (166). Lark fails to assert his dominance over the Ojibwe reservation, but Yeltow's influential position makes him a more formidable obstacle to Native sovereignty; he dismisses the Sun Dance as "a form of devil worship" and "[tries] to store nuclear waste on sacred Lakota earth" (166). In short, both men personify the contemporary nation's drive to expropriate Native resources and eradicate Native cultures.

Linden Lark also shares telling areas of resemblance with a figure from the settler-colonial past—*The Plague of Doves'* Warren Wolde, the unhinged white man who committed the pitiless, bloody murders for which three Ojibwe were hung. Not only are the two men's names similar in length, cadence, and alliterative structure, they exhibit similar behaviors and "[lurk]," as Susan Strehle observes of Wolde, "in demented hostility on the edges of the community" (114). Other characters in the two novels notice both men's frequent and unaccountable absences—like Warren Wolde, who tends to "go missing, for days sometimes" (Erdrich, *Plague* 139), Linden Lark "goes away a lot" and is "secretive" about his activities (Erdrich, *Round House* 52). Wolde is described as a "crank" with "a number of peculiar beliefs . . . regarding the United States government. Certain things were never mentioned around him—Congress being one, and all of the amendments to the Constitution" (Erdrich, *Plague* 309). For his part, Lark "is involved in a local chapter of Posse Comitatus," an organization espousing the philosophy that "the powers of the highest elected official of government should reside with the local sheriff" (Erdrich, *Round House* 52). Dangerously self-absorbed, both men lash out when confronted with obstacles or limitations. Linden Lark has "cracked" more than once (127), and Warren Wolde is prone to irrational outbursts of fury, "fly[ing] into a sick obliterating rage" when challenged (Erdrich, *Plague* 309).

Like the "sadist[ic]" Lark, who congratulates himself for being "one sick fuck" and remains in the community in the wake of his own pitiless crimes (Erdrich, *Round House* 92, 161), Wolde lives on his family farm—set on what was once "Indian land" (Erdrich, *Plague* 152)—until

being committed to a mental institution. There, “to everyone he met, he nodded and said, ‘I’ll slaughter them all,’” a refrain that brings to mind not only the murders he committed but his complicity in three Ojibwe being “unbearably murdered for nobody’s justice” (228, 308). Less directly, Wolde’s statement of murderous intent also evokes the larger history of Indian Removal that created space for his farm. Associating Linden Lark with Warren Wolde (and the history of injustice recorded in *The Plague of Doves*) and with Curtis Yeltow (and the continuing injustice of state-sanctioned exploitation), Erdrich points to the pervasiveness of colonial invasion as an enduring “structure” rather than a finite “event” (Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism” 388), an inescapable feature of national existence.

Positioning Geraldine’s rape as representative of “most Indian rape cases” and Geraldine herself as representative of Ojibwe culture, the novel makes the unprosecuted rape a metaphor for a wider and more far-reaching crime, a crime as old as the earliest colonial enterprise in the New World. Geraldine’s catastrophic encounter with Linden Lark recapitulates in broad strokes the catastrophe of the Ojibwe encounter with the forces of settler colonialism; it reenacts a history of violent invasion and appropriation fueled by supremacist righteousness and racist denial of humanity. Lark’s violation of Geraldine’s physical and spiritual sovereignty leaves her with “many of the same symptoms” manifested by survivors of colonization: “self-blame, loss of identity, and . . . depression and despair” (Deer, “Decolonizing” 150). Having endured crushing violation by an agent of settler colonialism, Geraldine’s subsequent pain and anguish echo tribal experience at the open of the reservation era: she starves and grieves, and she suffers fear, alienation, and hopelessness.

But Erdrich also uses Lark’s rape of Geraldine to highlight Ojibwe resilience and resistance. She presents Geraldine’s story as a parable not just about endurance but about survivance, “creat[ing] a sense of Native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry” (Vizenor, “Aesthetics” 1). Although she has been reduced to “a skeletal wraith” (Erdrich, *Round House* 157), Geraldine reclaims her spirit and sense of self when she becomes aware she must act to preserve the future, embodied in Mayla Wolfskin’s daughter. Geraldine’s emergence from her state of separation, starvation, and near death reflects the enduring spirit manifested by the Ojibwe over the long course of U.S. colonial invasion.¹⁰ When Geraldine

determines that Linden Lark, wiindigoo-like, is "trying to eat" her family and evinces a fierce determination to "stop him" (248), Joe concludes that during the "time she lay dull in her closed room she had actually been sharpening herself" (260). Geraldine is an unkillable mother, like Akiikwe and Buffalo Woman before her, and her transformation from little more than a "corpse" (90) to "a new formidable woman" (193) mirrors the resilience of Ojibwe culture itself.

In a *New York Times* editorial entitled "Rape on the Reservation," Erdrich quotes a well-known Cheyenne proverb that holds "a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground." *The Round House* protests unrelenting colonial violence against Native women and Native cultures while simultaneously illustrating (in terms both figurative and literal) the "grace and endurance" of both. Their hearts, Erdrich maintains, have not been conquered. Even so, the novel never loses sight of the painful truth that flesh-and-blood women are being raped now, today, on reservations in the United States of America in the twenty-first century—a time in which the nation recognizes, stigmatizes, and prosecutes sex crimes more vigorously than at any time in its history.

In addition to constructing a parable of Ojibwe survivance, Erdrich uses the crime against Geraldine Coutts to illustrate the real human consequences of the triumphalist model of American history and the unending violence of settler colonialism by making the reader, as Julie Tharp points out, "a witness" (25) to the suffering of Geraldine and her family. Through Joe's eyes, readers piece together the awful evidence of Lark's attack on Geraldine. We feel his shock at finding his mother frozen in a state of terror, "vomit down the front of her dress" and "dark blood" "soaking her skirt," her face swollen and bruised, her lips "cracked" and "bleeding," smelling of gasoline and shaking "with a steady shudder" (Erdrich, *Round House* 7). With Joe, we sense Geraldine's agony in the aftermath of the vicious rape and near murder and watch helplessly as a strong, vital woman becomes "no more than a stick figure" (187). Having felt his confusion, fear, and rage, readers mourn with him the loss of his "perfect family" (96) and share his frustration as justice wends along its dead-end path. After seeing that his mother's account of her rape "is like poison in [him]" (165), we follow Joe to his reluctant conclusion that he is the only person who can protect his mother by killing her rapist (261). Readers endure with him the excruciating suspense and dread

preceding his murder (with Cappy's assistance) of Linden Lark and his horror afterward. As the novel draws to a close, leaving the Coutts family sentenced to "endure," to live with the "sorrow that would persist into [their] small forever" (317), we share their struggle to reckon with the implications of Joe's act.

Some commentators interpret Joe's murder of Linden Lark as just, even necessary, given Lark's threat to the community and the fact that Native women "cannot depend on external systems of justice to provide justice and accountability" (Deer, *Beginning* 122). Others view the crime as a stain on Joe and on the tribe. Joe himself worries that his "spirit" will "flee" from him "because of what [he'd] done" in deliberately taking a life, and he fears becoming like Lark (Erdrich, *Round House* 294, 300). However, most of the reservation population appears to believe justice has been accomplished, and members of the community—including Lark's sister—protect Joe and Cappy from discovery. Finally, Bazil concludes that according to "traditional precedent," Linden Lark arguably meets "the definition of a wiindigoo," and "with no other recourse, his killing fulfilled the requirements of a very old law" (306).¹¹

The impasse created by the intersection of Joe's crime against Lark with Lark's crime against Geraldine compels readers to reconsider the meaning of "justice," a word that in its ubiquity and singularity implies something obvious and self-explanatory, something concrete and absolute. Joe's family's story demonstrates that in different contexts, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang observe, justice "takes on varying and sometimes contradictory meanings" (5). For Native peoples, they suggest, "justice" often proposes a response to conditions and events produced by colonialism, functioning as "a placeholder for actions and stances against dispossession, displacement, and death" (4). In this context, justice might involve "holding power accountable to its abuses" and lead to repudiation of the "logics of (state) administration of justice" in favor of asserting and defending Native sovereignty and protecting and empowering Native people. This model of justice necessitates "call[ing] attention to the state of perpetual *injustice*" endured by Native peoples in a settler-colonialist nation (4) and advocating for self-determined change, as Erdrich does in *The Round House*.¹²

Having "moved way far past [law] books" and "into the stories Mooshum told in his sleep" (Erdrich, *Round House* 307), Joe occupies an ambiguous terrain between indigenous models of accountability (as

represented by the round house) and the U.S. government's "monopoly on justice" (Tuck and Yang 7). From this position, the adult narrator, now a tribal judge, continues Basil's work "build[ing] a solid base" for Ojibwe sovereignty (Erdrich, *Round House* 229). In so doing, Joe also extends a project he formulated as a boy combing through his father's law books. Despite the overt colonialist bias evident on virtually every page of the *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*, the thirteen-year-old Joe felt certain that "the grandeur and power" of traditional Ojibwe culture "wasn't entirely lost, as it was, at least to some degree [he] meant to know, still protected by the law" (2). Continuing his pursuit of this goal, Joe seeks within the "unfair maze" (306) of the U.S. legal system the means for survivance-minded people to wrest possibility, even some measure of justice, from conditions of colonial violation and denial.

"Native survivance," Vizenor argues, "is a continuance of stories" (*Native Liberty* 1). The story Joe tells in *The Round House* translates the cultural priorities articulated by Buffalo Woman and symbolized in "the body of [his] mother" into the languages of the contemporary reservation, U.S. legal/historical discourses, and fragments of Ojibwe world-views conveyed to him by his grandfather. In this sense, Joe's narrative models the enduring nature of Ojibwe cultural practices; he embraces the "tease" of tradition, knows and uses "the names of [his] ancestors" (Erdrich, *Round House* 100), turns to his clan doodem for guidance, sprinkles his narrative with Anishinaabe terms and phrases, and displays casual yet in-depth knowledge of the geographies of the reservation, its history, its people. His facility weaving together seemingly disparate discourses and his construction of an affirmative set of associations around his mother, the round house, and cultural survivance conveys Erdrich's certainty that although colonial "trauma truly threatens the future of tribal nations" (Deer, *Beginning* 45), Ojibwe culture is and will remain unkillable.

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NOTES

1. As Kevin Nance explains, in addition to consulting reports, Erdrich “interviewed several Native women who were the victims of sexual attacks on reservations; with each interview her anger increased, as did her determination to write a novel about the topic” (51). The report Erdrich references in her afterword is entitled *Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA*. Legal scholar Sarah Deer notes that “the ‘one in three’ statistic was originally published in a 2000 report on the National Violence Against Women Survey, which concluded that 34.1 percent of Native women will be raped during their lifetime (meaning that the more accurate statement is *more* than one in three Native women).” Deer also points out that the fact that “about nine in ten American Indian victims of rape or sexual assault had white or black assailants” is strikingly unusual, given that “violent crime in America is almost always intraracial” (*Beginning* 4, 6).

2. A recurring figure in Erdrich’s canon, Nanapush represents Ojibwe tradition and history in novels including *Tracks* (1988), *Four Souls* (2004), and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001). His name evokes Naanabozho, “the compassionate woodland trickster” and “existential shaman in the comic mode” who “wanders in mythic time and transformational space between tribal experiences and dreams” (Vizenor, *People* 3, 4).

3. It wasn’t until 1978 that the American Indian Religious Freedom Act abolished restrictions on Native religious practices; therefore, as Joe notes, the “old days” are “actually not such old days” (Erdrich, *Round House* 59).

4. In contrast to Anglo-European models of sovereignty that claim “the exclusive right to exercise supreme political authority over a certain geographic area or group of people or both,” Jill Doerfler observes, survivance constitutes “a reimagination of sovereignty that brings control to tribal nations and encompasses political status, resistance, cultural values, and traditions” (186, 191). Vizenor defines survivance as “a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or a theory. The theory is earned by interpretations, by the critical construal of survivance in creative literature, and by narratives of cause and natural reason” (“Aesthetics” 11).

5. Note that the novel’s association of mothers and culture is not universal or absolute. Joe never assumes that all mothers are nurturing and does not always act with respect toward mother figures. His relationship with Sonja, who acts as his aunt and has “mommed him,” is particularly problematic; it does, however, lead to his awareness that he risks becoming a “gimme-gimme asshole” and to his resolution “to be something better” (Erdrich, *Round House* 223).

6. Traditionally, Basil Johnson observes, Ojibwe people “regard[ed] themselves as members of a totem, then a community. Strangers, when they met, always asked one another . . . What is your totem; only afterwards did they ask . . . Who are you?” (qtd. in Wong 177). Cary Miller explains, “Each Ojibwe doodem bears the name of an eponymous ancestor that emerged from the Great Water” to initiate its clan (39). In Ojibwe tradition, “the doodem spirits teach and protect each person from birth to death,” and “even today, when Anishinaabeg people introduce themselves in the

Ojibwe language, they state their name, doodem, and the community to which they belong" (39, 42).

7. For example, Bazil references *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), which establishes the federal government's lone authority to deal with Indian nations, and *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* (1903), which affirms the authority of Congress to void treaty obligations negotiated with Indians (wards of the nation).

8. Susan Strehle suggests that *The Plague of Doves* positions the lynching as "part of a generalized, racially motivated pattern of 'genocidal colonialism'" that has long been ignored in U.S. historical and political narratives (113).

9. See Julie Tharp for similarities between Mayla's plot and the real-life story of Jancita Eagle Deer, a Native woman who in 1974 accused the governor of South Dakota of raping her and later died under suspicious circumstances.

10. Erdrich celebrates Geraldine's strength but also acknowledges that the rape has irrevocably changed her, just as colonial invasion has altered tribal nations. In addition to wounds that require surgery to repair, Geraldine suffers permanent injury as a result of Lark's attack; her left eyelid "droops[s] slightly . . . from then on, for the nerve had been tampered with and the damage was irreversible" (Erdrich, *Round House* 35).

11. In *The Beginning and End of Rape*, Deer notes "anecdotal evidence that tribal nations took rape seriously enough that punishments in some regions included corporal punishment, banishment, and even the death penalty" (21).

12. Erdrich continues her investigation into meanings and modes of justice in *LaRose* (2016). This third novel in her "justice trilogy" steps away from interrogation of legal systems and judicial processes to focus on ways in which individuals negotiate their understandings of and impulses toward retribution and atonement.

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Book Reviews

Layli Long Soldier. *WHEREAS*. Graywolf, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-5559-7767-2. 114 pp.

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2016 Whiting Award winner Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota) introduces part II of her debut collection, *WHEREAS*, recipient of the 2018 National Book Critic Circle Award in Poetry, as well as the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award, by overtly labeling it as a response to the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans: it is, she explains, “directed to the Apology’s delivery, as well as the language, crafting, and arrangement of the written document” (57). Thereafter, she presents her response: a sequence of poems—twenty pieces starting with “WHEREAS” and ending in a semicolon until a full stop in the last, followed by six “Resolutions” and a “Disclaimer”—mimicking the form of S.J. Res. 14—111th Congress (2009–10), sponsored by a bipartisan group of US senators, predominantly from states with (once) large Indigenous populations, almost exactly. But Long Soldier’s commentary goes well beyond form. Although she has asserted that she didn’t think of herself as a political writer before she began this series of poems, and still doesn’t (see Brooks), time and again Long Soldier’s “Whereas Statements” talk back to the so-called apology and appropriate the US government’s language to start to address the innumerable silences in the “official” record. She not only assimilates fragments of the actual text of the congressional resolution into many of the poems in part II but also seizes entire passages, nearly eradicates some (as represented by faint print), dismisses others to mere footnotes, and molds the remaining words into the shape that she wishes them to take. If the US government sought to pigeon-hole the “more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the US” (57) into “Native Peoples,” avoid the word “genocide” at all costs, and gloss over atrocities—past as well as present—from forced removal to boarding schools to contemporary conditions on reservations, then Long Soldier’s poetry challenges the government’s declarations at every turn, while

also figuratively reenacting the violence perpetrated against the many Indigenous nations using the very language of the US government. Consequently, as others have noted, reading Long Soldier's work without a copy of this legal document at hand will result in missing many of the intricacies of her text.

However, to focus solely on the "Whereas Statements" of the second half is to see only "hanké, a piece or part" of Long Soldier's whole response (64). Part I, "THESE BEING THE CONCERNS," are not pieces that can be read quickly or in a straightforward manner merely for their content; instead, they are designed to convey multiple layers of meaning through their visual form. Long Soldier begins this section with "Ĥe Sápa," where, for example, in "Three" of five, she plays with language and visual poetry by rearranging the same thirteen words, "This is how you see me the space in which to place me," into four different lines to create a square (8). Deceptively simple, the work invokes the boundaries of a reservation, implies the destruction of Indigenous cultures through the emptiness *between* the lines, emphasizes the gaps in knowledge of "you" that have helped to create this situation (represented by blank spaces *within* the lines, where some of the original thirteen words have been excluded), and calls for "you," presumably a non-Indigenous, US audience, not only to "see this space" in the poem and that within "you" but also ultimately to recognize the final omitted "me."

Long Soldier's choice to start at this place—the sacred and embattled Black Hills, as Ĥe Sápa are known in English—and with this shape also seems far from coincidental. As it so happens, Zitkala-Ša (Ihanktonwan Dakota), in *Impressions of an Indian Childhood* (1900), notes that when first learning beadwork, she "usually drew easy and simple crosses and squares," only to progress to more difficult designs (74). Similarly, Long Soldier begins her text by following Zitkala-Ša's lead: she creates a square. By the third part of "Diction," as Long Soldier continues to develop her poetic voice, she uses the paragraph that appears just before Zitkala-Ša's sentence quoted above to craft a blackout poem, but rather than completely obscure the words, like the sinew strand described, she merely strikes through them, which results in these lines: "It took many trials before I learned how to knot my point the difficulty was in keeping my thread twisted, so that I could easily string original designs" (16). The work ends with "*I thank Zitkála Šá as I learn to other wise put—*" with white space between "other," "wise," and "put—" (16). On the facing

page, Long Soldier attempts an even more difficult project: she borrows a passage from James Welch's *Killing Custer: The Battle of Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (1994) and proceeds to create an erasure poem that pushes the intelligibility of the English language nearly to its limit.

While these poems hint at Long Soldier's connections to the Institute of American Indian Arts and Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, her work is far from derivative, and it isn't experiment for experiment's sake. Long Soldier's study of language and thoughts on poetry give way to "Wahpániča":

I beg from a dictionary to learn our word for *poor* comma in a language I dare to call *my* language comma who am I. A sweeping chill my stained mouth just oil at the surface comma because I feel wahpániča I feel alone. But this is a spillover translation for how I cannot speak my mind comma the meta-phrasal ache of being *language poor*. (44)

As such, the poems go beyond exploring the boundaries of meaning in English but are also an attempt to reclaim, learn, and share the nuances of Lakota, because, as Long Soldier states elsewhere, "I'm never sure how to write our language on the page correctly, the written takes many forms" (75).

Whether drawing on Lakota/Dakota/Nakota writings, history, or what might be personal experience, Long Soldier strings events of the past—like the execution of the Dakota 38 memorialized in the last poem of part I—together with more recent ones—like the confrontations between armed government forces and the #NoDAPL Water Protectors at Očhéthi Šakówiŋ camp recorded in "Resolution (6)"—to reveal that, congressional apology or not, much remains the same. This point is further emphasized in the last of Long Soldier's "Whereas Statements," which summarizes a *New York Times* op-ed piece, "Broken Promises" (10 July 2013), written by former senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND, 1991–2011), who recounts the conditions he witnessed during a visit to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where Long Soldier is from. Long Soldier incorporates an actual comment from a girl urging readers to sign an online petition, only to declare:

Dear Fourteen-Year-Old Girl, I want to write. The government has already “formally apologized” to Native American people on behalf of the plural *you* [. . .] *You*, as in all American citizens. *You* didn’t know that, I know. Yet indeed, Dear Girl, the conditions on reservations have changed since the Apology. Meaning, the Apology has been followed by budget sequestration. In common terms sequestration is removal banishment or exile. In law-speak it means seizure for safekeeping but changed in federal budgeting to mean subject to cuts, best as I can understand it. (84)

Thus here, as in the rest of the poem, Long Soldier offers a biting criticism not only of people who visit reservations with their “youth groups,” smacking heavily of the centuries of missionaries who have come before, but also of those who think that an online petition through *whitehouse.gov* will somehow “really mean a lot to a lot of people” (84). But Long Soldier perhaps saves one of the hardest hits for Dorgan himself, who happened to be chair of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee when the apology was passed in the first place.

Given the space constraints of this review, I can only offer the briefest glimpse of the provocative and inspiring complexities contained within this astonishing debut. However, anyone studying this work would do well to keep this in mind: while Senator Dorgan and his colleagues used “Whereas” in their statements as a recital of past facts, it would be a mistake for Long Soldier’s readers to limit their understanding of the word to this single definition. Long Soldier suggests this herself when she declares: “WHEREAS the word *whereas* means it being the case that, or considering that, or while on the contrary; is a qualifying or introductory statement, a conjunction, a connector . . .” (79). It is no accident that Long Soldier selected this word as the title: to ignore its various connotations and denotations is to suppress the multifaceted voice that speaks throughout the collection and overlook the broader vision woven into this work by meticulous design.

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Around Pynchon, and has published additional chapters on both elsewhere. As the conference director and a digital humanist, she is also building the UND Writers Conference Digital Collection, 1970–present (digital.undwritersconference.org).

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Tadeusz Lewandowski. *Red Bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Ša*. American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series. U of Oklahoma P, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8061-5178-6. 276 pp.

Cari Carpenter, *West Virginia University*

A forefinger she presses to her lip. The young man arouses himself from his stupor. His senses belie him. Before his wide-open eyes the old bent figure straightens into its youthful stature. Tusee herself is beside him. With a stroke upward and downward she severs the cruel cords with her sharp blade. Dropping her blanket from her shoulders, so that it hangs from her girdled waist like a skirt, she shakes the large bundle into a light shawl for her lover. Quickly she spreads it over his bare back.

"Come!" she whispers, and turns to go; but the young man, numb and helpless, staggers nigh to falling.

The sight of his weakness makes her strong. A mighty power thrills her body. Stooping beneath his outstretched arms grasping at the air for support, Tusee lifts him upon her broad shoulders. With half-running, triumphant steps she carries him away into the open night.

Zitkala-Ša, "A Warrior's Daughter"

The significance of the finale of this scene becomes more apparent when seen through the lens that Tadeusz Lewandowski offers in the book *Red Bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Ša*, the first biography of this important early American Indian author and activist. "A Warrior's Daughter" was written during a key period of Zitkala-Ša's

relationship with Carlos Montezuma, her one-time fiancé and eventual colleague in the Society of American Indians. As Lewandowski writes, “The two had sparred over her overt refusal to adopt a submissive position within their proposed marriage. They stumbled on another philosophical disagreement over what role women should play in a future Indian rights organization that both wished to establish” (60). When the scene is placed in this context, it is easy to liken Tusee to Zitkala-Ša, the warrior who takes an active role as leader.

This is the kind of material I wish I’d had when doing earlier work on Zitkala-Ša (also known as Gertrude Bonnin). There is much to admire here. First, the structure of this genre gives space for historically situating her in ways not done before. Lewandowski starts with a lengthy discussion of Bonnin’s position as a Yankton citizen and what that meant vis-à-vis the complex history of Sioux tribes in the nineteenth century: the land dispossession, the prevalence of the Ghost Dance, and the legacy of Indian boarding schools. With those details, we are better prepared to understand aspects of her life that are otherwise perplexing: for example, her conversion to Catholicism while working beside a priest on the Uintah Reservation. This shift helps explain not her antipeyote campaign, which was conducted on moral rather than religious grounds, but her other activist motivations: her work, for example, with homeless and abused Utes. It also helps explain her renewed willingness to work with whites of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, which was so key to her later efforts. *The Sun Dance Opera* is also given detailed attention: as Lewandowski notes, while contemporary critics have read it as “inauthentic,” a problematic representation geared toward a predominantly white audience, it in fact reflects a Sun Dance performed on the Uintah Reservation in the early 1900s in defiance of the US government’s attempts to end tribal religious ceremonies and dances.

I was surprised, however, to see little incorporation of Jane Hafen’s interpretation of the opera; her publications are included in the footnotes, but frankly I see Hafen as the premiere expert on Bonnin who deserves more voice here. Similarly, as vain as it may seem, I was surprised to see a lack of mention of my article on Bonnin in the 1920s, when she and others initiated an investigation into whether a woman who went by the name Princess Chiniquilla was indeed an American Indian. Given Lewandowski’s extended discussion of the historical context of Bonnin’s life, I couldn’t help but hope for an extended version of

what I began in my article: a discussion of her life, and the lives of other Indigenous people, in the larger context of the 1920s. More generally, I would have appreciated further analysis of the consequences of things like Zitkala-Ša's conversion to Catholicism. Why was it so attractive to her at that particular moment? Did she find it linked, somehow, to traditional Yankton spirituality? How did it inform her activism? Many scholars of Native American literature have taken up the issue of the relevance of feminism in Indigenous contexts, and this is also a discussion I would have liked to see pursued here, especially given stories like "The Warrior's Daughter." Further, while Lewandowski describes Zitkala-Ša as a "New Woman" at one point, he does not consider what it might mean to describe an American Indian woman in those terms. How did she reconcile traditional Yankton Sioux views with the predominant beliefs of white women? Does such a title distance her from her Indigenous background, or did she find new ways to define it as an American Indian woman? Given that the "New Woman" is often associated with modernity, this title might be a productive way to challenge stereotypes of the "premodern" Indian who was fixed in the past. Such questions would in turn help us understand her relationships as well as her lasting legacy among the Association for American Indians, the NAISA, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

In a time in which the field of Native American studies has grown so much more interested in the specific tribes of authors rather than a generic "American Indian" identity, Lewandowski's early words on her status as a Yankton Sioux member help explain her relationship to many of the issues she pursued: in his words, "After so many years of destructive white encroachment, broken treaties, and massacres, Zitkala-Ša, a (female) Sioux Indian from Yankton, bent much of the U.S. government apparatus to her will, in a sharp reversal of historical tradition" (149). More, however, is left to say about precisely how she did this. So while this is a commendable first biography of Zitkala-Ša, it also signals that it should not be the last.

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P, 2015); *Selected Writings of Victoria Woodhull: Suffrage, Free Love, and Eugenics* (U of Nebraska P, 2010); and *Seeing Red: Anger, Sentimentality, and American Indians* (Ohio State UP, 2008).

Mini Aodla Freeman. *Life among the Qallunaat*. First Voices, First Texts. U of Manitoba P, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-88755-775-0. 277 pp.

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Life among the Qallunaat is the story of Mini Aodla Freeman, an Inuit woman from James Bay who moved to Ottawa in 1957 and became a translator for the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources. Aodla Freeman begins her narrative with her experiences in the South and her encounters with the qallunaat, which translates imprecisely as “white people,” and then she goes on to detail her childhood on Cape Hope Island and at residential schools, first in Moose Factory and then in Fort George. It was precisely this last aspect of the book that caused the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to reportedly hide almost half of the book’s run in a basement upon publication. In the new author interview that appears at the beginning of the revised edition, Aodla Freeman suggests that the department feared what she might reveal about the residential school system. Though the book received positive reviews in the mainstream press, the department’s actions effectively ruined its chances for success. This new edition in the University of Manitoba Press’s First Voices, First Texts series gives this important book a new chance.

The book, first published in 1978, was, as Aodla Freeman conceived it, an answer to *My Life among the Eskimos* (1977), written by Bernhard Adolph Hantzsch, a German ornithologist. Aodla Freeman’s text is written as a “reverse ethnographic” narrative, as the editors point out in a very useful afterword (262). Indeed, she is not the informant but the storyteller. In the first half of the book, the author describes her experiences “among the qallunaat,” as a stranger in a strange land, using a recognizable ethnographic lens. Certainly in reversing the gaze, Aodla Freeman calls attention to ethnographic compulsion to analyze each minute detail of the “Other.” While this conceit might get tedious, the fact that she uses humor at the same time makes the book more enjoyable and more compelling. For example, she has this amusing interac-

tion with a policeman after walking on a lawn bearing a sign that reads “Keep off the grass” (48). This is one of many “qallunaat rules” that she critiques in this section of the book, one that she cannot understand, just as she cannot fathom having to be quiet in a library. She juxtaposes these rules with Inuk traditions; for example, “we give [the names of dead people] to the newborn” (49). She does not shirk the ethnographic; in fact, she has the agency to reveal aspects of her culture on equal footing as the beliefs of the qallunaat. The “strange land” is the land of the qallunaat, the urban spaces of the 1950s.

This revised edition of *Life among the Qallunaat* makes an important contribution to the canon of Indigenous autobiography, particularly as it consciously seeks to restore the author’s agency and original intents—with her permission and input. The new book removes “editorial interventions,” the ways in which this story was initially mediated. For example, the new editors have restored text that had previously been cut, including some of Aodla Freeman’s original language. They have retained the title *Life among the Qallunaat*, though it came from the original editor, but they have removed the three-part structure conceived by him. A line-by-line comparison with the original text might be a productive exercise for students of Indigenous literatures, just as the book would make an interesting comparison to other mediated autobiographies, to think about the ways in which Indigenous voices have historically been altered, edited, and manipulated.

As a narrative of residential school, Aodla Freeman’s book is especially relevant in the present, especially in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (2006), which included the two schools she attended. While attendance may not have been mandatory for James Bay Inuit families, Aodla Freeman’s narrative details how her grandfather’s respect for authorities compelled him to agree to send her to school. Though in her interview the author suggests that she “exercised restraint” in describing her experience in the schools, the section in which she first goes to Moose Factory is named “I Was Dumped.” The way in which she describes the foreignness of the school is compelling and traumatic: she is immediately bathed and given new clothing, she is the only Inuk girl and must learn three dialects of Cree and English simultaneously, the food is repulsive to her, the church service is “horrifying,” and she is “lonely” in a room of two hundred beds (104). While perhaps “restrained,” the

details of her residential school experience reveal a harsh system bent on forced assimilation, with little academic rigor. Reading this book through a contemporary lens, given what we now know to be true about residential schools, allows us to fill in the gaps of this narrative and view it as a survivor's testimony.

Finally, Aodla Freeman's role as a translator of culture and later, as a translator of language, makes this an especially compelling book. This progression is highlighted by the book's narrative arc: the story begins in the city and only later picks up her early childhood, ending when she first becomes a translator. As the narrative progresses, Aodla Freeman demonstrates her translation skills; the number of Inuit words that she translates literally increases as the book goes on. The act of becoming a translator becomes a parallel story to that of her becoming a writer. The book is episodic, comprised of memorable short chapters or "memo-ries," which, in the beginning, read as tentative attempts to tell the story. The editors suggest that the text actually functions as autobiographical "testimony" and that its fragments or short episodes mirror Indigenous narrative tradition—particularly in the way Inuk people (elders especially) are encouraged to speak from their own experiences (261). Thus, Aodla Freeman's book demonstrates how the autobiographical "I" has cultural relevance and a history grounded in the storytelling tradition.

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