

VOLUME 36 · NUMBERS 1–2 · SPRING-SUMMER 2024

Studies in American Indian Literatures

Editor

KIARA M. VIGIL, Amherst College

Published by the University of Nebraska Press

Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *ArticleFirst*, *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, *Bibliography of Native North Americans*, *Current Contents–Arts & Humanities*, *Education Collection*, *Education Database*, *Education Research Complete*, *Education Source*, *Electronic Collections Online*, *ERIC*, *Humanities Abstracts*, *Humanities International Complete*, *Humanities International Index*, *Humanities Source*, *Humanities Source Ultimate*, *IBR*, *IBZ*, *Linguistic Bibliography*, *MLA International Bibliography*, *OmniFile Full Text Mega*, *OmniFile Full Text Select*, *Periodicals Index Online*, *ProQuest Central*, *Research Library*, *Scopus*, *Social Science Premium Collection*, and *TOC Premier*.

Cover photo courtesy of Bonita Bent-Nelson, copyright © 2003. Cover and interior design by Kimberly Hermesen.

GENERAL EDITOR

Kiara M. Vigil, Amherst College

EDITORIAL BOARD

Amy Gore, Mandy Suhr-Sytsma, Matthew Herman, Tammy Wahpeconiah, Drew Lopenzina, Julianne Newman, Kate Shanely, Shanae Aurora Martinez, Anne Jansen, Brian Twenter, Alyssa Hunziker, Grace Dillon, Jenna Hunnef, Chris Pexa, Daniel Heath Justice, Jenny Davis, Dan Radus, Phillip Round, and Caroline Wigginton

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Ty Smart

EDITORS EMERITUS

June Scudeler, Siobhan Senier, Chadwick Allen, James Cox, Daniel Heath Justice, Helen Jaskoski, Karl Kroeber, Robert M. Nelson, Malea Powell, John Purdy, and Rodney Simard

CONTENTS

vii From the Editor

ARTICLES

- 1 The Elusive John Rollin Ridge: The Afterlives of "An Indian's Grave" and His Ambiguous Literary Legacy
TRAVIS FRANKS
- 23 Of Service and Ceremonies: Laguna's Tribal Stories
MARY LUDWIG
- 46 The Indigenous Final Girl in Stephen Graham Jones's *The Only Good Indians*
CYANNE SO-LO-LI TOPAUM
- 65 Tobacco, Snakes, and Wolves: Uncoiling Sovereignty
from the Erotic in *Drowning in Fire* by Craig Womack
HANN SCURLOCK
- 86 "Lines of Inquiry"
ABIGAIL CHABITNOY
- 100 Aayuu Metipay Meyaay Emat: Bringing Her Voice Back to the
Land: The Literary Rematriation of
The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero
THERESA LYNN GREGOR
- 123 Unquiet Title: Rewriting Indian Country in Leslie Marmon Silko's
Almanac of the Dead
ALEX HARMON
- 149 George Copway's Figures of Homesickness
JAKE MCGINNIS

The Elusive John Rollin Ridge

The Afterlives of “An Indian’s Grave”
and His Ambiguous Literary Legacy

TRAVIS FRANKS

Abstract: Despite his having been credited with multiple literary firsts, John Rollin Ridge and his literary contributions are not yet firmly situated in American Indian and Cherokee literary histories. The critical attention afforded Ridge’s writings have thus far disproportionately focused on his California-based writings and his biographical details. In both cases, analyses have been conducted through the lens of assimilation versus tradition, which fails to appreciate the density of Cherokee culture. Travis Franks’s analysis of “An Indian’s Grave,” an early, overlooked poem published by Ridge in 1847, suggests that the beliefs that formed Ridge’s unique cultural-political identity first took shape in the works he authored while in Arkansas during his nascent literary career. Specifically, Franks contends that the poem encapsulates Ridge’s particular beliefs about Cherokee identity in the United States following Removal and, further, that his ambiguous position in the study of American Indian literature stems from those very beliefs.

Keywords: Cherokee literature, John Rollin Ridge, “An Indian’s Grave,” assimilation, density

John Rollin Ridge occupies an uncomfortable place in American Indian and Cherokee literatures, in part, because the man and his writing do not fit neatly with the ways we tend to think about Indigenous political identities and cultural productions. Among literary scholars, Ridge is most well-known as the author of *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854), which is generally considered the first novel by an Indigenous author published in the United States. Even here, Ridge’s legacy is complicated, as critics have offered drastically different interpretations

of this formative work. Cheryl Walker has argued that *Joaquín Murieta* is not primarily about Indigenous peoples and therefore should not be considered American Indian literature at all.¹ Louis Owens has argued, conversely, that the novel appropriates the Murieta narrative in order to fictionalize the bitter factionalism that led to the Cherokee Removal and the assassination of several of Ridge's family members, including his father (John Ridge), grandfather (Major Ridge), and second cousin (Elias Boudinot).² His familial connection to one of the most notorious events in Cherokee and, indeed, US history further confounds Ridge's place in the canon because it situates him as an assimilationist and has engendered questions about the authenticity of his writing.³

Ridge's literary career also tends to be lumped into two phases: his early days as an aspiring poet in Arkansas and the Cherokee Nation and a later, more mature period as a key figure in the formation of California's English-language literary tradition.⁴ It is well-documented that, in 1849, at the age of twenty-two, Ridge killed a political enemy in a dispute over a horse, an event that precipitated his hasty retreat to the goldfields of California and, eventually, his ascension as one of the state's most prominent newspaper editors. Emigrating west and publishing under the names Yellow Bird and John R. Ridge, this scion of one of the most prominent families in the Cherokee Nation went on to author scores of poems and editorials for regional and national newspapers while in California. This body of work simultaneously promoted Ridge's beliefs in manifest destiny and what he perceived to be the cultural superiority of "modern" Cherokee intellectuals over western Indigenous peoples, whom he believed lagged in adapting to supposedly "civilized" life within the rapidly expanding nation.

For a little over two years before his self-imposed exile out west, however, Ridge had already been publishing poems in newspapers like the *Arkansas State Gazette* and the *Arkansas State Democrat*, in addition to essays in newspapers in New York and Texas. While so much has been written about his California works, there are significant errors and omissions in our knowledge about Ridge's first publications, particularly so with the poems he published while living in Arkansas.⁵ James W. Parins rightly notes that those early poems often dealt with themes of love and nature and were "imitative of the romantic style then in vogue. But," Parins continues, "it is clear that he was also thinking about the fate of Indian peoples in the ever-changing modern world." As proof,

Parins points to what he identifies as an untitled poem from 1847 that “describes the thoughts of a solitary walker in the woods who happens upon an Indian grave.”⁶ Given the degree to which the romantic style has yoked together ideas about nature, Indigenous people, and modernity, the grave immediately—and troublingly—calls to mind longstanding themes of noble savagery, vanishing races, and Indian ghosts that would seemingly support assertions about Ridge’s assimilationist worldviews. The grave was such an evocative symbol that Ridge titled the poem, simply, “An Indian’s Grave,” though Parins and a handful of scholars who have since written about it have frequently stated that the poem is untitled. More importantly, the few critical treatments the poem has received have failed to grasp its nuance, for while “An Indian’s Grave” trades in problematic stereotypes of Indian savagery, it also challenges settlers’ attempts to claim the land as their own by destroying evidence of Indigenous history.

How might this overlooked and underappreciated poem give us a fuller understanding of the elusive John Rollin Ridge and his complicated legacy as a Cherokee writer? By more deeply contextualizing “An Indian’s Grave,” I hope to shift the scholarly conversation on Ridge away from the binaries that reflect his difference as an assimilationist toward, instead, his unique location within the internal density of mid-nineteenth-century Cherokee culture. Ridge was, in his way, an ardent and outspoken defender of Indigenous peoples who also spent his entire adult life embroiled in a blood feud with John Ross and other politically powerful Cherokee men. Despite the many wrongs inflicted on Cherokee people by the federal government, Ridge became a passionate US nationalist who, though he eventually sided with the Confederacy, firmly believed in manifest destiny and the righteousness of the Union—even after the outbreak of the Civil War.

The genesis of these unique views can be seen in Ridge’s earliest published poems, particularly so in “An Indian’s Grave,” and the poem is best understood, as is so much of Ridge’s writing, as possessing an energy produced by forces that he did not see as wholly contradictory. Though many have viewed Ridge as an outlier, an assimilationist cut off from his cultural roots, Ridge never renounced his Cherokee identity. Nor did he view himself as a liminal figure, as has routinely been suggested by critics. He was not trying to live in two worlds, in other words; he was trying to draw them into balance with one another through his writing.

As a self-styled “modern” Cherokee man, Ridge believed he would serve as a cultural conduit channeling the rich histories of Indigenous peoples into the largely triumphant narrative of a developing settler nation. Without speculating about the supposed authenticity of Ridge’s Cherokee identity, I argue that Ridge saw himself and Indigenous peoples like him as members of a distinct ethnic group that, while facing some resistance, could ultimately be woven into the United States’s colonizing project without disavowing their cultural heritage.

In the essay that follows, I make the case that greater attention should be paid to John Rollin Ridge’s earliest publications and that appreciating his broader oeuvre will require recognizing his adoption of settler and Cherokee rhetorical techniques in creating written acts of accommodation and resistance. I recontextualize Ridge’s “An Indian’s Grave” by first correcting errors in the bibliographic record before offering my own reading of the poem, which emphasizes the literary influences behind the poem’s romantic depiction of stereotypical Indian characters whom I argue Ridge would have seen as distinct from Cherokee peoples like himself. I connect the poem’s depiction of Indianness to his earliest newspaper essays, as well as his later, more well-known depictions of California’s Indigenous groups. Finally, I offer a reinterpretation of the poem’s important second stanza in order to amplify the subtle act of resistance to settler colonialism therein.

REREADING “AN INDIAN’S GRAVE”

THROUGH THE LENS OF CHEROKEE DESTINY

Daniel Heath Justice and Joshua B. Nelson have called for more nuanced understandings of Cherokee literature that go beyond the tendency to classify writers in relation to the binary of traditional versus assimilated.⁷ Justice suggests that Cherokee literature should be understood through a culturally specific framework of balancing naturally occurring tensions between the dual poles shaping Cherokee worldviews: order and chaos, peace and war. Nelson insists that Cherokee politics—and, by extension, literature—are and always have been more fluid than presumed by the binary of traditional versus assimilated, designations that are often linked to social standing and blood quantum.⁸ Justice and Nelson seem to be in agreement that this persistent framework has limited and thus misconstrued our appreciation of Cherokee cultures’

density, a term used by Chris Anderson to acknowledge the degree to which a broad array of Indigenous identities have been flattened and circumscribed in the name of creating an oppositional *difference* against which white settler identity can be defined.⁹ In other words, we need not insist that John Rollin Ridge and his works are any less Cherokee simply because they are contentious to the point of chafing against narrow expectations placed on Indigenous writers. It is somewhat surprising, though, that neither Justice nor Nelson includes an extensive analysis of John Rollin Ridge's work in their reconsiderations of Cherokee literary history, especially given the notoriety of his novel and the frequency with which his life and writing have been used as exemplars of assimilationist attitudes. Nonetheless, Justice's method of analyzing Cherokee literature within the Chickamauga (resistance) and Beloved Path (accommodation) structure is ideally suited for recontextualizing what has previously been interpreted as a paradoxical or contradictory tension at the heart of Ridge's work.¹⁰

Meanwhile, a handful of scholars have begun looking to Ridge's many poems and editorials as important but underappreciated works in the study of American Indian literature. In order to make the case "that Ridge's multifaceted career is due for reconsideration," Alanna Hickey points out that even though "the vast majority of scholarship on Ridge has focused on his novel, the archive of writing that Ridge built during his lifetime suggests that he thought of himself as a poet, editor, and historian, over and above the designation 'novelist.'"¹¹ Ryan Carr further suggests that "little attention has been paid to Ridge's poetic output, even though . . . Ridge may have been the first American Indian author to publish lyric poetry."¹² This lack of critical attention stems, in part, from the fact that Ridge's poems remain largely scattered across anthologies and various archives. There has been, in essence, only one volume of Ridge's poetry published, a posthumous collection simply titled *Poems* (1868), which Arnold Krupat credits as "the first volume of poetry to be published by a Native American."¹³ James W. Parins and Jeff Ward have produced a digital collection titled *The Poems of John Rollin Ridge: A Reproduction of the 1868 Publication Plus Fugitive Poems and Notes* (2004). These "Fugitive Poems" account for some—but not all—of the poems that were published during Ridge's lifetime but were for some reason excluded from the original 1868 volume. The poem originally known as "An Indian's Grave" is among them, though it does not appear by that name.¹⁴

“An Indian’s Grave” was first published in the August 6, 1847, issue of the *Arkansas State Democrat*, but it was not included in the initial publication of Ridge’s posthumous collection *Poems* (1868). Confusion over the title stems from the poem’s appearance in an obscure newspaper article from 1941 in which it was reprinted—without its original title—in Elizabeth McSwain’s “Member of a Minority.”¹⁵ Both of the poem’s stanzas are incorporated near the end of McSwain’s retrospective on Ridge’s life and works, though they serve not so much as a testament to his poetic skill but as a kind of eulogy for the poet himself. Parins seems to have worked from the untitled version appearing in McSwain’s article, which he cites in his influential biography *John Rollin Ridge: His Life & Works*. Most other scholars have followed suit, referring to the poem as Parins had, as “[Far in a Lonely Wood].” Edward Whitley’s discussion of the poem in *American Bards: Walt Whitman and Other Unlikely Candidates for National Poet* is, to my knowledge, the most extensive analysis to-date, but as I argue later in this essay, Whitley’s analysis lacks the contextualization necessary to appreciate the poem’s density.¹⁶ Elsewhere, Arnold Krupat briefly mentions the poem in *That the People Might Live: Loss and Renewal in Native American Elegy* (2012), though he quickly dismisses it, writing “there is no continuance or survivance to be imagined here.”¹⁷ Whitley and Krupat both cite Parins’s *John Rollin Ridge* in their analysis of the poem, but neither cites McSwain nor the poem’s original 1847 publication in the *Arkansas State Democrat*. Both versions—the original 1847 publication and the untitled 1941 reprint—are nearly identical, so using one over the other seems unlikely to have influenced any of these scholars’ analyses of the poem itself.

Robert Dale Parker correctly identifies the poem by its original title in *Changing is Not Vanishing: A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930*, but here, too, there are minor errors in the poem’s publication history. In the anthology’s bibliography, Parker suggests that “An Indian’s Grave” is “Probably a version of ‘Far in a Lonely Wood.’”¹⁸ Comparing Ridge’s 1847 version to McSwain’s 1941 reprint, it is clear that the two poems are one in the same, minus the missing title and minor typographical inconsistencies. “[Far in a Lonely Wood,]” is, technically, a version of “An Indian’s Grave” created by its inclusion in McSwain’s article. Parker further speculates that two other poems, “Sunday in the Woods: Impromptu, Addressed to L——” (1857) and “The Woods” (1853), are “Probably a version of ‘Far in a Lonely Wood,’” though he

notes that he had not seen the original printing of either poem prior to compiling the anthology.¹⁹ I was able to procure copies of each of these poems as they first appeared in print, as well as a copy of the untitled reprinting of “An Indian’s Grave” that appeared in 1941. I can confidently say that, while forest scenes factor into all three works, neither “Sunday in the Woods” nor “The Woods” are versions of “An Indian’s Grave.” They are distinct in content and form but, to date, neither has been collected along with Ridge’s other poems.²⁰

“An Indian’s Grave” opens with the speaker recalling having once walked alone through a remote wooded area, the exact location of which is not revealed. Instantly, Ridge casts a somber mood over this fateful trip into the woods, which the speaker describes in the opening line as “lonely” (l. 1) and, later, as “silent” (l. 4) but for the “melancholy songs” (l. 3) of birds and a nearby “stream which ever poured a mournful sound / Amid those solitudes so dim” (ll. 6–7). This subdued atmosphere turns the speaker’s brooding mind to the deep past, to thoughts of “greatness fall’n, beauteous things destroyed” (l. 12). And it is in this mournful frame of mind that the speaker then comes across “A mound of moss-grown earth” (l. 14), which he immediately recognizes as a burial site. While the speaker briefly ponders who might be buried within the mound, his memory—and his imagination—quickly take over: “soon I minded me, / That many years ago a noble race / Had roamed these forest-wilds” (ll. 16–18). More than just “roaming” the wilderness, these ancient inhabitants had “made / These mountain fastnesses redound to shouts / Of liberty untamed, and happiness / That knew no bonds” (ll. 18–21). But just as quickly as Ridge’s speaker recalls those halcyon days of a “noble race” thriving in their ancestral homeland, he also recalls that they came to a dramatic, definitive end: “I recollected now / That, save but a few, they had all fled, / And fleeing, left some bones behind; the only / Mark that this fair land was once their heritage, / By Nature’s gift to her untutored sons” (ll. 21–25). Based on this recollection, the speaker further assumes that the grave must belong to one of the last warriors (if not *the* last warrior) to have defended this homeland while the others fled. Unfortunately, his decision to remain in place seals the warrior’s fate, as, according to the speaker, the moment must have inevitably arrived in which “he saw his country / Doomed, his tribe o’erthrown, and his strong arm / Grown weak before his pale-faced foe” (ll. 28–30). With no chance of survival and having realized that he must

soon “travel to the hunting-grounds” (l. 33), the warrior dug out a grave and, in a moment ripe with melodrama, sang “wild his death-song to the wind, / Sunk down and died!” (ll. 35–36).

There is very little in the first stanza to distinguish this poem from so many others that invoke romantic tropes about Indianness. “An Indian’s Grave” is remarkable because of its second stanza, in which the speaker takes on the role of the grave’s protector and, by extension, a preservationist of Indigenous history. Beyond vowing not to disturb the grave, the speaker pledges to keep its location secret from settlers. While he acknowledges that “[t]he white man’s share may plough some other / Mounds where Red men sleep, round which no mourner / Stands in watch to guard the relics of a friend,” he promises the interred warrior that “no rude step, and no rude hand shall e’en / Despoil the beauty of this silent spot; / Or sacrilegiously disturb the rest / Of one lone Indian form” (ll. 40–46). The poem concludes with the speaker explaining to the warrior that modernity has wrought dramatic changes to the world he once knew, making the quiet grave the only place where the deceased might find peace.

Ridge’s poem fits within a literary framework established by white writers that narrates Indianness in relation to death, burial, and disappearance. For instance, “An Indian’s Grave” uses phrases and tropes similar to those appearing in the conclusion of James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). Ridge ends the first stanza of “An Indian’s Grave” with the speaker standing before the burial site, imagining that one of the last warriors of “a noble race” is finally overwhelmed by “pale-faced foes.” Cooper’s novel similarly ends at Uncas’s grave, with Lenape Elder Tamenund lamenting the fact that, not only are “[t]he pale-faces . . . masters of the earth,” but that he has “lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans!”²¹ The poem and novel are also both interested in the transferal of Indianness thought to occur once the supposedly primitive first peoples inevitably vanish. Whereas Cooper’s settler character Natty Bumppo replaces Uncas in becoming a “new” kind of American in whom both European and Indigenous cultures commingle, Ridge’s speaker vows to act as the mound’s caretaker and prevent degradations by white settler agriculturalists. In doing so, the speaker implies that he has a place in the developing nation. His connection to the land through the mound also suggests that Indigenous cultures and histories can be part of the nation’s future, even as

their belonging is presently contested and, at worst, in danger of being erased.

Ridge's romantic encounter with the mound is therefore also reminiscent of Revolutionary-era poet Philip Freneau's most well-known work, "Lines Occasioned by a Visit to an old Indian Burying Ground" (1788). More commonly referred to simply as "The Indian Burying Ground," Freneau's Romantic lyric features a speaker whose mind races at the sight of a burial mound, a testament to the fact that, as Chadwick Allen explains, settlers have been fascinated by and quick to speculate about Indigenous-made mounds and earthworks since the early days of colonization.²² As is the case with Ridge's "An Indian's Grave," Freneau's poem depicts the mound as a relic built by "ancients of these lands" (l. 5), "children of the forest" who once "played" (l. 28) in Edenic nature before it was transformed into farmland. And while, like Ridge's speaker, Freneau's speaker cautions readers not to disturb the site—"No fraud upon the dead commit" (l. 18)—he seems to know the specific funerary items contained within the mound and their cultural significance. This knowledge leads him to suggest that the particular burial mound in question belongs to a warrior, as, in a footnote to "The Indian Burying Ground," the poet explains that "North American Indians bury their dead in a sitting posture; decorating the corpse with wampum, the images of birds, quadrupeds, &c: And (if that of a warrior) with bows, arrows, tomhawks [*sic*], and other military weapons," the very items described in stanzas three and four of the poem.²³ Notably, while Ridge and Freneau trade in the same markers of the vanishing Indian stereotype, the former does not recycle the latter's association of supernatural powers and spectral forms with Indianness.²⁴

Yet even as he does not assume a ghostly form, Ridge's dead warrior is nonetheless problematically depicted as ill-suited for life in the modern world. Renée L. Bergland contends that Freneau's "The Indian Burying Ground" and poems like it "denied Indian survival as they mourned (or occasionally celebrated) Indian dispossession and extinction."²⁵ While Ridge's "An Indian Grave" can and should be read in relation to these works, it also stands slightly apart in that it does not deny Indigenous survival *in toto* because the speaker, whom I interpret to be a stand-in for Ridge, does not see himself as the vestige of a bygone era but rather as an evolved Native American well-suited for life in the nineteenth century. While he shares the bond of Indigeneity with the man he imagines

within the grave, he most certainly would have distinguished himself from his noble savage creation.

Ridge's deep entrenchment in the language of settler colonialism presents a major obstacle in analyzing his works, and "An Indian's Grave" is no exception. The speaker's reading of the mound is undeniably skewed by colonizing logics, yet I resist the impulse to read the poem as a straightforward example of assimilationist writing. To be clear, I interpret Ridge's use of the vanishing Indian motif as evidence suggesting that his worldview had already by this point in his life been formed, in part, by the adoption of colonialist beliefs, values, and aesthetics that degraded Indigenous peoples and their cultures. The fact that he trades in such stereotypical depictions of Indigenous peoples cannot be overlooked, nor should it occlude the significance of the second stanza's message about resistance. Understanding how the two fit together helps us appreciate Ridge's place within the density of Cherokee culture at this particular historical moment.

This is where my reading of the poem most diverges from previous interpretations. As has often been the case where Ridge is involved, Edward Whitley's reading of the poem understands Ridge as a liminal figure, "an intermediary between white and Native society."²⁶ As such, Whitley suggests that the poem's first-person speaker "could either be a white man trying to connect with Native culture or a Native American whose immersion in white society has distanced him from his indigenous heritage."²⁷ The poem provides little evidence to support the former interpretation, and Whitley more thoroughly pursues the theory that the speaker is a detribalized, assimilated Indigenous person. However, he notes, "If the narrator is indeed a Native American, his ignorance concerning the gravesite—as well as his eagerness to imagine a history for it—is puzzling."²⁸ Whitley's critique seems at least partially based on a misunderstanding of Indigenous cultures as static and monolithic. We cannot assume that the speaker is any less Cherokee simply because he does not intimately know (or readily share) the history of the land he presently occupies as a dispossessed person. Yet this line of thinking leads Whitley to suggest that the speaker is stuck between being either non-Native or not-quite-Native-enough: "Despite the narrator's demonstrated investment in Euro-American culture—as evidenced by his ignorance of the burial site and his reliance on the aesthetic of the vanishing Indian—his vow to preserve the land reveals a

sincere desire to remain connected to his Native heritage.”²⁹ Such formulations of Indianness create and reinforce impossible standards of authenticity in the guise of traditionalism. As Justice and Nelson have argued, Cherokee identity is never as simple as being either traditional or assimilated, especially when it comes to the Ridge family.³⁰

From the poem alone, we cannot know the complexities of the speaker’s identity with absolute certainty. Yet I do not see our interpretations being limited to either a sympathetic white mourner or a detribalized Native American at odds with their cultural heritage. Instead, I imagine the speaker simultaneously embodying both whiteness *and* Cherokee culture in ways not unlike the Ridges and other prominent Cherokees of the period, including John Ross. And while I share Whitley’s desire to know definitively which Tribal Nation would have been responsible for the earthwork’s creation—as rightfully identifying ancestors in this way fundamentally challenges colonial erasures—I do not interpret the lack a specific tribe being identified by name as proof of the speaker having “lost touch with his Indigenous heritage.”³¹ Rather, those forces of colonization that so profoundly altered connections between Indigenous cultures and their homelands are more likely to blame. Removal and diaspora forced mass movements of Indigenous peoples onto lands not their own, lands that already held the living histories of other Indigenous peoples.

That the speaker of Ridge’s poem—presumably a Cherokee man but certainly someone aware of the degradations carried out on ancestral remains in the name of making improvements upon the land—does not immediately identify for the reader the tribal community most likely associated with the earthwork simply cannot be taken as proof of the speaker’s assimilation into settler culture. Perhaps he is withholding this information from us much in the same way that he is withholding the mound’s exact location from white settlers. Allen notes the prevalence with which such “burial mounds were looted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or were destroyed in the development of settler agriculture and the building of settler towns, highways, railways, or canals.”³² Patrick Wolfe has argued that “agriculture, with its life-sustaining connectedness to land, is a potent symbol of settler-colonial identity” even as (or especially because) “[t]hrough its ceaseless expansion, [it] progressively eats into Indigenous territory.”³³ Ridge accurately depicts the plough as a symbol of the destruction of Indigenous cultures

and histories, yet he also directly benefitted from the violence of agricultural and extractive practices. Ridge descended from men who accumulated massive wealth via plantations and the forced labor of enslaved Black people. And he specifically sought exile in California because he believed that he might resuscitate the family's wealth via a gold rush that profoundly harmed western Indigenous peoples and their homelands. Indeed, Ridge financed his flight west by mortgaging his claim over an enslaved man named Grigg, whom he had inherited ownership over, and he brought another enslaved man named Wacooli with him to California.³⁴ A broader accounting for Ridge's literary career and contextualization of overlooked works will inevitably produce these kinds of tensions because they reflect the particulars of Ridge's individual beliefs and his positionality within the density of mid-nineteenth-century Cherokee culture—a period marked by transition and tumult.

In fact, Ridge's earliest-known publication, an 1845 letter to the editor of the *New York Daily Herald* penned about a month after Ridge turned eighteen, demonstrates the young writer using the savage-versus-civilized binary to distinguish himself from other Natives—namely, his distant ancestors *and* his political rivals within the Cherokee Nation. Suggesting that “[t]he history of the Cherokees . . . partakes strongly of the character of romance,” Ridge describes his ancestors as

people, who from age to age have wandered savagely in dark forests and gloomy mountains until their very spirit becomes a corresponding darkness and gloom, who have lived from time immemorial under stern customs, even more imperious than laws themselves, and those customs far beyond the reach of even an extreme shadow of civilization, suddenly emerging from their ancient state and, throwing off the weights long centuries have imposed upon them, springing forward to the enjoyments, dignities, and the rights of civilized man.³⁵

Ridge's description of Cherokee ancestors bears some resemblance to his depiction of a vanished noble race in “An Indian's Grave,” though, notably, the primitive culture he evokes here lacks any actual nobility prior to its recent evolution. As a member of the new class of “civilized” Cherokees in this out-of-savagery narrative, Ridge is clearly catering to stereotypes about Indigenous inferiority deeply embedded in settler culture. In doing so, he is actually continuing rhetorical strategies used by

the previous generation of Cherokee writers, including Elias Boudinot, John Ridge, and John Ross. Nelson contends that “Cherokees pointed to their advancement in civilization according to the measures set before them as a means just of countering false descriptions of their savagery . . . but also to demand consistency and follow-through in federal policy.”³⁶ Indeed, Ridge concludes his letter to the editor by noting that members of the “anti-Ross party. . . have from time to time made their complaints to the general government, but officers of the government have changed so fast, and administrations come and passed so rapidly, that what one Congress has done in their favor has been destroyed by another, and so nothing has been done in the end.”³⁷ The consequences of such inaction meant that the Cherokee Nation’s future remained perilous, endangered by what Ridge considered to be the self-destructive despotism of the Ross Party.

Here, too, Ridge was working within a rhetorical tradition employed by Cherokee writers before him. Drew Lopenzina notes that “[n]ineteenth-century discourse, in particular, forwarded this dire either / or choice of assimilation or extinction for Native peoples, foreclosing on the notion that, perhaps, they could both change and grow while maintaining their traditional cultural identities.”³⁸ In an 1846 letter to editor of the *Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, young John Rollin Ridge proclaimed

I, Sir, am a Cherokee, and I love my people as I love my own heart’s blood. I would see them great, good, and happy. I would behold them with a pleased eye ascending the pathway of national honor and glory; but how forbidding such an event is the prospect now. Standing amidst the ruins of our name and primeval greatness, I cast my eye forward, and can discover nothing but the dark characters of doom written on the bosom of the future”³⁹

Despite the fact that, according to the assimilated versus traditional dichotomy, Boudinot and Ross are generally considered polar opposites, Nelson has convincingly demonstrated that both men employed similar rhetorical strategies when advocating for the survival of Cherokee culture.⁴⁰ For young Ridge, such nuances did not exist. In an 1849 essay titled “The Cherokees: Their History—Present Conditions and Future Prospects,” Ridge depicts Cherokee society as having been divided into antagonistic factions by the Removal: the Old Settlers, the Ridge or Treaty Party, the Ross Party, and an outlaw group of “banditti.”

Ridge openly accuses the much larger Ross faction of being backward and politically corrupt while casting himself and other members of the Treaty Party as misunderstood geniuses:

While things continue as they are, there must be a suffering minority, standing isolated from the general mass, marked for destruction, hated and oppressed. And it is the more to be deplored, when we consider that this general mass is ignorant, superstitious, and revengeful, paying blind and stupid obedience to one man, while this suffering minority is patriotic and intelligent, and composed of the best and purest intellects of the nation. It has been said, enlighten this ignorant mass, but it is vain to try it.⁴¹

Young Ridge's denigration of his fellow Cherokees can be read as an extension of what Kelly Wisecup refers to as John Ridge's "self-fashioning as someone who possessed intellectual tools that some of his fellow Cherokees, especially those who had not received a Western education, did not."⁴² The most significant difference, however, is that John Rollin Ridge made this perceived difference between groups of Indigenous peoples into a hallmark of his writing. Ridge had not only internalized the logic of savagism and civilization and applied it to his own people, past and present, but he did so with a sense of entitlement and elitism that he believed distinguished him from other Indigenous peoples.

This distinction forms one of the key connections between Ridge's early and later works that, so far, has been overlooked, as Ridge would eventually enforce a similar distinction when writing about the Indigenous peoples of California in his more well-known publications. In his analysis of *Joaquín Murieta*, for example, Blake M. Hausman critiques the "chauvinism and general prejudice toward western tribes" on display in the novel while insightfully deconstructing its imbalanced depictions of Indigenous Californians and a group of Cherokees who, like Ridge, arrive in California during the gold rush.⁴³ According to Hausman, Ridge "believed that Cherokees were more evolved than people indigenous to the West Coast."⁴⁴ Evidence of Ridge's prejudices are evident in articles like "A True Sketch of 'Si Bolla,' A Digger Indian" and "Oppression of Digger Indians," where Ridge vehemently speaks out against frontier violence against western Indigenous peoples while also using the very language that denied the density of their cultures. He railed

against white settlers' violent campaigns against Indigenous peoples of what is now Nevada and California while, in the same breath, describing them as "poor and imbecile."⁴⁵ In doing so, Ridge's writing—not unlike that of other Native writers deemed assimilationists—challenges the logic of settler-formed binaries of savagery and civilization "even as it repeats their constitutive terms."⁴⁶

Ridge's problematic depictions of California's Indigenous peoples occurred during a period of intense westward expansion and anti-Indian rhetoric. According to Ned Blackhawk, everyday settlers, journalists, and federal representatives saw Native peoples of the Mountain and Pacific West as belonging to either "great Tribes" like the Utes and Navajos or "lesser," non-equestrian communities who were lumped together under the racist slur "*Digger*." Blackhawk suggests that, while the term has been used to describe Paiute and Shoshone peoples in what are now Utah and Nevada, it originated as "a debasement of Shoshone gathering practices with strong homophonic resonance with America's most powerful racial epithet" against Blacks.⁴⁷ Deborah Miranda adds that "'Digger' (never an actual tribe, but often used as such by government officials in the vernacular of the day) referred [also] to Northern California Indians, peoples who had not been missionized by the Franciscans but instead endured the gold rush."⁴⁸ The slur's transit thus coincides with settler encroachment across the continent, moving westward and flattening the rich, complex cultural identities of Indigenous peoples who were simultaneously being dispossessed of homelands that were radically altered in the name of progress.

In fleeing to California, Ridge took part in this westward movement and, in turn, took up the derogatory term. While there is no justification for his having done so, if we recontextualize the articles about California's Indigenous peoples as a continuation or extension of his earliest publications, we can begin to see more fully the development of Ridge's distinct writerly identity. It is possible that Ridge understood the colonization of California's Indigenous lands and peoples as a moment that in some ways paralleled the radical changes experienced by and within the Cherokee Nation decades earlier. If so, the California-based essays like "True Sketch" and "Oppression" actually mark Ridge's continued use of an argumentative strategy that initially accommodates settler ideology through the use of anti-Indian rhetoric before shifting to a more critical, resistant stance in which he advocates for Native rights.

Indeed, my reading of “An Indian’s Grave” and its speaker’s interaction with the mound suggests that Ridge was sensitive to such changes from the beginning of his public writing life and here, again, my interpretation of the poem disagrees with previous scholarship. Where Krupat reads the total absence of continuance and survivance, I read Ridge (via the speaker) positing a form of continuance, however limited, made possible in part through his subtle act of resistance. That is, the speaker’s decision to withhold knowledge of this particular mound’s exact location from white settlers whom he assumes would destroy the earthwork should be read as an act of passive defiance. We might rightly criticize Ridge’s sense of entitlement in naming himself the mound’s sole protector, but the act of concealment ensures the mound’s continued existence. Consider, too, that even as he vows to protect the burial site with his silence about its location, he nonetheless composes these lines in which he openly marvels at its existence and imagines the dramatic events that might have brought it into being. The speaker’s imagined tale no doubt requires its own deconstruction, but it also creates the possibility of future interactions with and stories about the mound.

There is even some evidence within the poem to suggest that the speaker may actually be aware of the specific tribal community who constructed the site. Ridge’s speaker describes being suddenly struck by the memory that the wilderness upon which he walks was once populated by now-departed original inhabitants:

“But soon I minded me,
That many years ago a noble race
Had roamed these forest-wilds among, and made
These mountain fastnesses rebound to shouts
Of liberty untamed, and happiness
That knew no bonds. I recollected more,
That, save but a few, they had all fled,
And, fleeing, left some bones behind: The only
Mark that this fair land was once their heritage,
By Nature’s gift to her untutored sons.”

The speaker uses the ambiguous and problematic phrase “noble race” rather than the community’s proper name, but he knows at least something of their removal history. While in the next line he will begin crafting the fantasy of a warrior’s tragic death, the speaker also tells us that

only a few remained (and ultimately died) on the tribe's ancestral lands. The rest—the vast majority of the community—fled, meaning that this “noble race” can be re-read not as a vanished people but as a dispossessed community presumably now living elsewhere. Christen Mucher rightly notes that “Almost every Moundbuilder account centers the alleged disappearance—whether killed or chased away—of the mound-building peoples and their absolute lack of descendants.”⁴⁹ This begs the question: who built the mound above the grave that the warrior supposedly dug for himself? Might not his people have returned at some point after the violence and carried out their customary funerary practices? In her formative work on Indigenous earthworks, Leanne Howe states that mounds and other built sites “are embodied stories that Natives carry expressing our duration here as ever-alive and ever-returning.”⁵⁰ My reading may be overly optimistic and not in line with Ridge's original intent, but I am purposefully attempting to read into the poem traces of resistance and continuance that can be read against the more obvious examples of accommodation through anti-Indian rhetoric. That said, I am not interested in explaining away or resolving the problematic aspects of the poem. I find it more generative to discuss the fact that Ridge apparently did not consider his views to be problematic, as it evinces the density of Cherokee culture during his lifetime. Too, this line of thinking forces us to reconsider how dominant ways of thinking about Indigenous peoples have shaped our own ways of thinking about individuals like Ridge.

CONCLUSION

In an ironic turn of events, Ridge's use of the Vanishing Indian trope in “An Indian's Grave” led to the poem being repurposed, sans title, as a *eulogy* for Ridge himself in Elizabeth McSwain's 1941 retrospective “Member of a Minority”—the source material from which Parins drew when referring to the poem as “[Far in a lonely wood].” McSwain references a handful of Ridge's earliest poems and even reproduces (with the title) “The Robber's Song to His Mistress,” which has also been written about but does not appear in the original 1868 publication of *Poems*, nor as one of the “Fugitive Poems” collected by Parins and Ward. She writes that, having been unsuccessful in negotiating a new treaty between

Cherokee Nation and the United States federal government following the Civil War, “Ridge left Washington a disappointed man, to die at his Grass Valley home a year after his failure, . . . [at] only forty years old.”⁵¹ The poem follows immediately after this description of Ridge’s death, and the article soon-after concludes with a brief paragraph suggesting that Ridge, unhappy and ostracized during his lifetime, would now perhaps be accepted as an ethnic minority. In McSwain’s hands, Ridge is no longer the speaker who comes across the mound and vows to silently guard it but the tragic, forgotten warrior long-buried within the mound. Ridge, of course, saw himself as a modern Cherokee man and no doubt would have balked at McSwain’s having depicted him as a noble savage almost a century after he wrote the poem. But Ridge’s use of racist, colonialist tropes are detrimental, in part, for this very reason: his broader, non-Native audience would be much less likely to distinguish, as he did, between members of supposedly lesser, primitive tribes—whose time he believed was rapidly coming to a close—and the new class of Native Americans to which Ridge imagined himself belonging. This deeper contextualization might enrich our readings of *Joaquín Murieta* and other works from his time in California, in part, by providing a textual basis for comparative analysis rather than reading Ridge’s literary works against the details of his biography.

Despite his having been credited with multiple literary firsts, John Rollin Ridge and his literary contributions are not yet firmly situated in American Indian and Cherokee literary histories. The critical attention afforded Ridge’s writings have thus far disproportionately focused on his California-based writings and his biographical details. In both cases, analyses have occasionally been conducted through the lens of assimilation versus tradition. In my own analysis of “An Indian’s Grave,” I have suggested that the beliefs that formed Ridge’s unique cultural-political identity first took shape in the works he authored while in Arkansas during his nascent literary career. Specifically, I contend that the poem encapsulates his particular beliefs about Cherokee identity in the United States following Removal and, further, that his ambiguous position in the study of American Indian literature stems from those very beliefs.

Greater scholarly attention to Ridge’s poetry, much less his full oeuvre, is no doubt worthwhile, though a fuller appreciation for the sheer volume of his writing would not inherently resolve the deservedly scrutinized issues present in his much-studied novel. Carr notes, for instance,

that the few critiques written about Ridge's poems have held them up as proof of his assimilationist attitudes, as has occasionally been the case with *Joaquín Murieta*.⁵² Noted historian Angie Debo concluded her 1932 survey of Ridge's life and literary career by remarking, "He failed to realize in his poems his ambitious plans for presenting to the world the case of the oppressed Indian tribes, and became instead tritely conventional in the white man's manner."⁵³ Such analyses preclude our deeper understanding of Ridge's complicated legacy within Cherokee cultural history, which should be understood according to its own internal density rather than its difference from mainstream settler society.

TRAVIS FRANKS is a settler originally from Lorena, Texas. A McNair Scholar alum, he is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Utah State University. His work can be found in *Settler Colonial Studies*, *ariel*, *Western American Literature*, and *MELUS*.

NOTES

1. Cheryl Walker, *Indian Nation: Native American Literature and Nineteenth-Century Nationalisms* (Duke University Press, 1997), 111.
2. Louis Owens, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 32–33. See also Robert J. Conley, *Cherokee Thoughts: Honest & Uncensored* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 90–91.
3. Alanna Hickey rightly notes that his having written *Joaquín Murieta* and his biographical details have dominated the scholarly discourse around Ridge, often at the expense of his poetry and journalism. For instance, in his "assessment of Ridge's Indianness," Clyde Ellis argues that "[t]hough his bloodline confirmed his heritage, it is not altogether clear that anything more than romantic appeal tied him to that heritage" (377). See Clyde Ellis, "'Our Ill Fated Relative': John Rollin Ridge and the Cherokee People," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68, no. 4 (1991): 376–95. Thanks to Amy Gore for suggesting this essay. See also Alanna Hickey, "John Rollin Ridge," in *American Literature in Transition, 1851–1877*, ed. Cody Marrs (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 75–77.
4. James Parins's biography of Ridge is instructive here, as Ridge's escape west and his California-based writings make up the majority of the book (eight chapters in total), as opposed to chapter 3, "The Arkansas Years." See James W. Parins, *John Rollin Ridge: His Life and Works*, 2nd ed. (University of Nebraska Press, 2004).
5. In attempting to right the bibliographic record concerning "An Indian's Grave" and piecing together a more comprehensive list of Ridge's poetry by seeking out those poems' original publications, I came across what seems to be—at least for the moment—Ridge's first published poem. Apparently as yet unknown among Ridge's biographers and critics, "A light broke in upon my brain" appeared in the November

30, 1846, edition of the *Arkansas State Gazette*. The existence of this poem alters our understanding of Ridge's bibliography, as Gordon Fraser has published an article concerning his coming across "a previously unknown poem by a very young John Rollin Ridge, titled "To a Thunder Cloud," which he believed "to be Ridge's earliest extant publication." Publication of "A light broke in upon my brain" predates this poem by just a few months, though I hesitate to proclaim it Ridge's first published poem given the scattered nature of his bibliography. It is curious to note that, while "A light broke in upon my brain" was published on November 30, 1846, it is signed and dated "Yellow Bird. Osage, Nov. 31, 1846." November having only thirty days, it seems fair to say that, if this is Ridge's first published poem, it is also the beginning of the errors that are so prevalent in his bibliography. Also of note is the fact that "To a Thunder Cloud" is dated "Nov. 30th, 1846," though it was not published in the *Arkansas State Gazette* until January 9, 1847. Assuming they were penned on the same day, I cannot say conclusively which came first, the light or the thunder. And to be clear, Ridge had, by the time "A light broke in upon my brain" appeared in print, already published on the state of the Cherokee Nation in *Arkansas State Gazette* on May 11, 1846, and before that, in a letter to the *New York Herald* published on May 26, 1845. See John Rollin Ridge, "A light broke in upon my brain," *Arkansas State Gazette* (Fayetteville, AR), November 30, 1846, and Gordon Fraser, "Yellow Bird and the Thunder," *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 14, no. 4 (2014): n.p. Available at <http://commonplace.online/article/yellow-bird-and-the-thunder/>.

6. Parins, *John Rollin Ridge*, 54.

7. Daniel Heath Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), and Joshua B. Nelson, *Progressive Traditions: Identity in Cherokee Literature and Culture* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

8. Nelson occasionally uses the term *progressive* in place of *assimilated* and, to my reading, does so interchangeably.

9. Chris Anderson, "Critical Indigenous Studies: From Difference to Density," *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2009): 92. Thanks to Kirby Brown for suggesting this essay.

10. Justice, *Our Fire Survives*, 30–31. Justice explains that these two methodologies, drawn from the policies that once governed Cherokee towns prior to their consolidation, represent "the ever-fluid balance of strategic accommodation and tactical defiance." He concludes: "It is through the study of these contrasts that the dynamic strengths of Cherokee endurance are most starkly contrasted and illuminated" (42).

11. Hickey, "John Rollin Ridge," 75.

12. Ryan Carr, "Lyric X-Marks: Genre and Self-Determination in the Harp Poems of John Rollin Ridge," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 43, no. 3 (2018): 42.

13. Arnold Krupat, *"That the People Might Live": Loss and Renewal in Native American Elegy* (Cornell University Press, 2012), 128.

14. Parins's and Ward's expanded edition of *Poems* has been published online at <https://ualrexhibits.org/tribalwriters/artifacts/Poems-of-John-Rollin-Ridge.html>. The entry for "[Far in a Lonely Wood]" includes the following editors' note: "[*This

untitled poem was signed 'Yellow Bird,' and dated 'Osage, July 18, 1847.' It was reprinted in the *Arkansas Gazette* [sic], July 20, 1941.]”

15. Elizabeth McSwain, “Member of a Minority,” *Arkansas Gazette* (Sunday Magazine Section), July 20, 1941.

16. Edward Whitley, *American Bards: Walt Whitman and Other Unlikely Candidates for National Poet* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

17. Krupat, “*That the People Might Live*,” 128.

18. Robert Dale Parker, “Bibliography of Poems by American Indians to 1930,” in *Changing is Not Vanishing: A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 408.

19. Parker, “Bibliography,” 397.

20. John Rollin Ridge, “Sunday in the Woods: Impromptu, Addressed to L—,” *Sacramento Daily Bee*, June 15, 1857; John Rollin Ridge, “The Woods,” *Sacramento Daily Union* 5, no. 679, May 27, 1853.

21. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, 1826 (Oxford University Press, 2008), 394.

22. Chadwick Allen, *Earthworks Rising: Mound Building in Native Literature and Arts* (University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 5.

23. Philip Freneau, “The Indian Burying Ground,” in *The Poems of Philip Freneau: Poet of the American Revolution*, vol. 2, ed. Fred Lewis Pattee (The University Library, 1903), 369–70.

24. The two poems share an even deeper connection as, according to J. F. S. Smeall, at least six variant versions of Freneau’s “The Indian Burying Ground” were published during the author’s lifetime. See J. F. S. Smeall, “Variants: ‘The Indian Burying Ground’ of Philip Freneau,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 75, no. 3 (1981): 257–70.

25. Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (University Press of New England, 2000), 9.

26. Whitley, *American Bards*, 126.

27. Whitley, *American Bards*, 128.

28. Whitley, *American Bards*, 130.

29. Whitley, *American Bards*, 131.

30. Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*; Nelson, *Progressive Traditions*.

31. Whitley, *American Bards*, 130.

32. Allen, *Earthworks Rising*, 10–11.

33. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 395–96.

34. Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (University of California Press, 2005), 181; Parins, *John Rollin Ridge*, 62.

35. John Rollin Ridge, “The ‘Ross’ and ‘Ridge’ Parties,” *New York Daily Herald* 11, no. 143, May 26, 1845, 1.

36. Nelson, *Progressive Traditions*, 160.

37. Ridge, “The ‘Ross’ and ‘Ridge’ Parties,” 1.

38. Drew Lopenzina, *The Routledge Introduction to Native American Literature* (Routledge, 2020), 59.
39. John Rollin Ridge, “Fort Smith, April 30, 1846,” *Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, May 11, 1846.
40. Nelson, *Progressive Traditions*, 167–70. For a reexamination of Boudinot’s *Cherokee Phoenix* editorials, using Justice’s accommodation-resistance method, see Mikhelle Lynn Ross-Mulkey, “The *Cherokee Phoenix*: Resistance and Accommodation,” *Native South* 5 (2012): 123–48.
41. John Rollin Ridge, “The Cherokees: Their History—Present Condition and Future Prospects,” *The Northern Standard* (Clarksville, TX), January 20, 1849.
42. Kelly Wisecup, “Practicing Sovereignty: Colonial Temporalities, Cherokee Justice, and the ‘Socrates’ Writings of John Ridge,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017): 35.
43. Blake M. Hausman, “Indians in the Margins: Teaching the Native American Characters in John Rollin Ridge’s *Joaquin Murieta*,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 28, no. 2 (2016): 5. It is a bitter irony that the discovery of gold on Cherokee lands proved to be one of the most damning developments leading up to Removal.
44. Hausman, “Indians in the Margins,” 7.
45. John Rollin Ridge, “Oppression of Digger Indians, *Sacramento Daily Bee*, Evening edition, July 12, 1857. Reprinted in *A Trumpet of Our Own: Yellow Bird’s Essays on the North American Indian*, ed. David Farmer and Rennard Strickland (Book Club of California, 1981), 64.
46. Christopher J. Pexa, “More Than Talking Animals: Charles Alexander Eastman’s Animal Peoples and Their Kinship Critiques of United States Colonialism,” *PMLA* 13, no. 3 (2016): 653.
47. Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 275.
48. Deborah A. Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Heyday, 2013),
49. Christen Mucher, *Before American History: Nationalist Mythmaking and Indigenous Dispossession* (University of Virginia Press, 2022), 56.
50. Leanne Howe, “Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building, Ball Games, and Native Endurance in the Southeast,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26, no. 2 (2014): 89.
51. McSwain, “Member of a Minority,” 12.
52. Carr, “Lyric X-Marks,” 43.
53. Angie Debo, “John Rollin Ridge,” *Southwest Review* 17, no. 1 (1932): 71. Thanks to Amy Gore for suggesting this essay, as well.

Of Service and Ceremonies

Capturing Laguna's Tribal Stories

MARY LUDWIG

Abstract: Leanne Howe's concept of tribalogy, the idea that Indigenous authors integrate various aspects of their tribal experiences into their work, applies to Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, a novel that captures Indigenous veterans' experiences during the post-World War II era. While Silko's work predated the use of the term "settler colonialism," *Ceremony* interrogates the imperialistic structures in American society that Indigenous veterans navigated. Her book views the history of the American West through an Indigenous lens and reevaluates the history of Puebloan peoples. Simultaneously, the novel's publication in the aftermath of the Vietnam War reveals the issues Indigenous veterans faced as they re-integrated into a society built upon Indigenous dispossession during a time Indigenous peoples embraced self-determination. Silko reaffirms the credibility of Indigenous sacred knowledge and community by recreating healing experiences that defied Western medicine and confirmed the legitimacy of Native epistemologies and sovereignty.

Keywords: tribalogy, settler colonialism, sacred knowledge, dispossession, self-determination, veterans, sovereignty, PTSD

Chester Nez should have received a hero's welcome when he returned to the United States in 1945. Nez served in the United States Marine Corps as one of the original Navajo Code Talkers who used the Navajo language to develop an unbreakable code that allowed the Marines to encode and transmit military messages in the Pacific Front during World War II. Philip Johnston, who had achieved fluency in the Navajo's language while living on the Navajo Reservation where his father served as a missionary, conceived the idea to develop a military code in the Indigenous language. However, the ingenuity of young Navajo volunteers

who developed an unbreakable code brought Johnston's idea to fruition.¹ Chester Nez was one of those volunteers. Nez and the Navajos' linguistic contribution to America's war efforts almost failed to occur. Since the 1880s the United States had pursued an educational policy that sought to eliminate Indigenous languages and replace them with English.² As a young child, Nez attended the Tohatchi and Fort Defiance boarding schools, where teachers denigrated his cultural practices, language, and religious beliefs.³ Nez's familial relationships assured that he continued to speak and understand Navajo and the lifeways that had sustained the Navajo People for generations. His fluency ultimately benefitted the US Marines as the United States fought Japan.

Despite Nez and his Indigenous compatriots' important contributions to the war effort, he suffered hardships upon his return home. White Americans treated Nez as a second-class citizen, refusing him high-paying employment and denying him the right to vote, and he experienced psychological trauma. Nez explains, "I felt lost. Sometimes I actually thought I'd been killed. And the dreams—horrifying dreams of unearthly battles, with Japanese faces leering at me—refused to end."⁴ To process the harrowing events of his military career, Nez turned to traditional Navajo ceremonies after a traditional Navajo hand-trembler concluded that it was necessary for Nez's healing and return to balance. A year and a half after his return, his family arranged an Enemy Way ceremony to cleanse lingering Japanese spirits, chindi, from Nez's presence and restore his balance. The ceremony succeeded, and Nez explained, "I reentered the trail of beauty. For a long time afterward, my dreams and visions of the Japanese subsided."⁵ However, in 1971, the nightmares returned. Nez's wife organized another Enemy Way ceremony, but "things went wrong."⁶ The ceremonial drum broke, a young girl fainted during the dance she led, and a man killed a rattlesnake that tried to enter the ceremonial hogan.⁷ Despite these discouraging events, the family turned to yet another ceremony, the Holy Way, and Nez recovered his harmony again. The Enemy Way and Holy Way ceremonies exemplify the traditional means that Indigenous people used to adjust to civilian life. Other Indigenous peoples also turned to the cultural practices within their communities when coming home from the war.⁸ Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko captures the reality of Nez's World War II experiences in the novel *Ceremony* with a fic-

tional account of Indigenous veterans who return to the Laguna Pueblo reservation.

Leslie Marmon Silko's acclaimed novel *Ceremony* incorporates the traditions and realities of tribal peoples who returned from World War II. As a young girl living near Laguna Pueblo, Silko witnessed Indigenous purification ceremonies for combat veterans after World War II.⁹ Her novel emphasizes the importance of Indigenous knowledge and practice in healing psychological wounds. She explains that storytelling provides a central component of recovery: "The body of healing stories and storytelling are held communally and are practiced together and always have been."¹⁰ While Silko's work predates that of Choctaw author and English professor LeAnne Howe, *Ceremony* exemplifies Howe's supposition that Native novels present a "tribalography," in which Native authors integrate all tribal aspects, including the people, land, nonhuman relatives, lifeways, and belief systems, and link these aspects across past, present, and future.¹¹ Silko presents the story of Tayo, a returning Laguna World War II veteran, to examine the various traumas that the Laguna People underwent both before, during, and after the war.¹² Using Tayo as the protagonist, Silko explores the dispossession of Indigenous lands, the influence of non-Native education on Indigenous children, the role of Indigenous soldiers in the military, and the difficulties Indigenous veterans faced upon their return from war. Silko interrogates the role of settler colonialism throughout this historical period and seeks to correct the erasure of Indigenous belief systems. Importantly, the context within which Silko wrote—the Termination era and the aftermath of the Vietnam War—informs Silko's stories.¹³ Silko critiques the limitations of American culture and the goals of settler colonialism while revealing the validity of Native ceremonies that shaped the perceptions of Indigenous peoples throughout their history; in doing so, she offers a path for the Indigenous future and provides readers with a "tribalography" of the Laguna People.

Settler colonialism underpins the trauma that Tayo encounters throughout the novel. In the 1990s, scholars debated the efficacy of applying the term colonialism to a broad range of experiences. Patrick Wolfe coined the term "settler colonialism" to describe the process in which non-native settlers claim Indigenous homelands and attempt to eliminate the Indigenous peoples of those lands.¹⁴ European settlers used the Doc-

trine of Discovery to assert their right to Indigenous lands and ignore Native ownership and inherent rights to their homelands. The Doctrine of Discovery describes the European concept that under international law, the discovery of lands occupied by heathens, infidels or savages, gave rights of conquest and colonization to the discovering European nation.¹⁵ The Catholic Church and European nations codified this doctrine both religiously and legally and applied it to all European nations. Indigenous communities stymied European dreams of economic success and resource exploitation. Indigenous peoples had intimate relationships to their homelands and resisted settler colonial efforts to claim them.¹⁶ The solution to this Indigenous barrier was to obliterate, literally and figuratively, the Native.¹⁷ White settlers effectively created structures and practices to enact this agenda. Physical actions, legal systems, and nationalistic rhetoric established the structures of settler colonialism that continue to the present day. Silko interrogates the foundational structures of settler colonialism in *Ceremony*, even though scholars had not yet coined the term when the novel was originally published in 1977. Silko's construction of a tribalography that incorporates the history and belief system of Laguna Pueblo, while simultaneously addressing Indigenous solutions to current issues reframes the legitimacy of American ownership, materialism, and the erasure of Indigenous peoples.¹⁸ Silko offers a literary challenge that counters Indigenous erasure, evokes Indigenous nationalism, and creates a path for a Laguna future.¹⁹

Silko's examination of Indigenous dispossession underscores the critique of settler colonialism within her work. Silko analyzes the relationship between Puebloan peoples and the land and other-than-humans, and her approach illustrates how Indigenous authors weave tribal stories into their work.²⁰ Understanding the background of the Laguna Pueblo provides the foundation for grasping Silko's development of Laguna tribalography. While archeologists identify the presence of Indigenous ancestors as emerging at approximately 10,000 BCE in the American Southwest, the Keresan-speaking people of Laguna envision their origins differently.²¹ Literary critic Edith Swan describes the sacred geography of the Laguna People, in which they moved through four worlds to emerge in the present, fifth world.²² Silko incorporates these sacred origin stories within the text of *Ceremony* where the Laguna fifth world "had become entangled with European names."²³ She intersperses the story of Hummingbird and Fly with the healing of Tayo, who believes

he has prayed the destructive six-year drought into being. Fly and Hummingbird must carry out a proper ceremony to restore the world to order and bring back the rain by traveling through the four worlds to ceremoniously heal the current one. The story of the four worlds underneath the present one informs the Lagunas of their particular, sacred place in the world. The roles of other-than-human beings in Laguna sacred stories contribute to the plot and adhere to Laguna understandings of their relationships with place, flora, and fauna. Importantly, these relationships express Laguna sovereignty that envisions connections between the land, people, and other than humans while rejecting settler colonial understandings of jurisdiction and dominance.²⁴ Origin stories affirm Laguna identity. Laguna is both a place and a people.²⁵

Silko weaves the stories that encapsulate and reaffirm Laguna identity and place throughout *Ceremony* and enlightens the reader to the importance of land in Laguna history, once again demonstrating how the novel reveals the tribalography of the Indigenous people. Silko states, "The Pueblo people have always connected certain stories with certain locations; it is these places that give the narratives such resonance over the centuries. The Pueblo People and the land and the stories are inseparable."²⁶ Puebloan history unfolds across a sacred landscape and is foundational in understanding Silko's story. The Laguna Pueblo emerged out of a settler colonial experience. In 1598, Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate marched into the Puebloan lands with 560 people, including 129 soldiers, and violently established Spanish dominance over the region.²⁷ For almost a century, the Spanish imposed the coercive *encomienda* system onto Indigenous lands, an economic organization in which Spanish conquistadors laid claim to Puebloan land and goods and impoverished and enslaved the Native people while confiscating their corn and blankets. In addition, the Spanish enforced religious compliance and government onto the Pueblos.²⁸ By the 1670s, the Pueblos had experienced enslavement, a massive decline in population, and religious repression.²⁹ Despite these conditions, the Puebloan peoples retained Indigenous systems of government, often secretly meeting in *kivas* to make internal decisions.³⁰ The Puebloans asserted their sovereignty and independence from the Spanish in the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, which forced the Spanish to flee from the area in response to a massive wave of coordinated violence. In the wake of the successful removal of the Spanish, Puebloan peoples established the community of Laguna and ultimately

made peace with the Spanish when they returned, developing a relationship based on compromise rather than coercion.³¹ Cooperation guided Indigenous Pueblo and settler relations for generations, but the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ushered in significant changes.

The Lagunas experienced two substantial alterations in colonial power during the nineteenth century. In 1821, the Mexican Revolution transferred Spanish power to the new Mexican government, which declared all Indigenous residents to be citizens. This relationship proved transitory, as the United States–Mexico War forced Mexico to cede half of her land, including the American Southwest, which housed Laguna Pueblo. Ostensibly, the US government recognized Indigenous peoples as citizens with valid land claims because Mexico had recognized them as such. However, Americans ignored Indigenous ownership and quickly lay claim to Indigenous lands.³² In 1921 and 1922, New Mexican Senator Holm Bursum introduced the Bursum Bill, which would have legitimized the land claims of approximately twelve thousand settlers who maintained their possession of Indigenous lands. Bursum also championed the mineral exploitation of executive order reservations (which would have allowed exploration for mineral resources on twenty-two million acres of Indigenous lands) and Circular 1665, which tasked Indian superintendents with punishing Indigenous peoples who practiced tribal ceremonies that US officials found morally unacceptable.³³ Indigenous peoples and prominent supporters, such as John Collier, Mabel Dodge, D. H. Lawrence, and Zane Grey, formed the American Indian Defense Association to fight off these colonial measures, and they ultimately succeeded. Bowing to Indigenous pressure, Congress passed the Pueblo Lands Act of 1924 and later the Pueblo Relief Act of 1933 to compensate Puebloan residents for the loss of their lands. While Puebloan peoples received \$1,361,958 for land losses, they failed to achieve the return of their illegitimately taken lands.³⁴

Silko critiques the loss of Indigenous lands and emphasizes the palpable Indigenous ties to the land in *Ceremony*. Tayo's psychological fragmentation and injuries mirror the settlers' division of and harm to Puebloan lands. However, Silko challenges settlers' hegemony and ownership through the healing that takes place within Tayo, which offers a template for the reclaiming of the land. Silko presents a narrative construction of literary nationalism that reconnects Tayo to the land and severs the boundaries that settlers built.³⁵ The defense of land begins

with Tayo's response to the novel's antagonist, Emo, who proves to be fatally destructive by the end of the novel. Emo describes the drought-ridden lands of Laguna as an "old dried-up thing!"³⁶ Emo's insult makes Tayo shake with anger. Yet, Tayo's emotions are also mixed with guilt at the thought that the Laguna lost the land to the white people.³⁷ Tayo's emotions stem from the relationship of the Laguna to the land, which Silko accentuates when Tayo meets the medicine man Betonie, who lives in a cabin that overlooks Gallup, an area that continues to be known for its poverty and the abuse of Indigenous people.³⁸ Despite Betonie observing the ongoing degradation that Indigenous people experienced at Gallup, he finds "comfort in the land," because he belongs to the land.³⁹ Tayo's search for the missing Mexican cattle reinforces this sense of belonging. Notwithstanding the cattle being fenced on land claimed by settlers, Tayo justifiably cuts the barbed wire that borders the stolen land and recognizes the lie of legitimate white possession. The Texan and cowboy who find Tayo on the land reiterate the lie that Tayo now understands, saying, "These goddamn Indians got to learn whose property this is!"⁴⁰ Despite the settler statements, Silko emphasizes the valid claim of the Laguna by developing the story of Tayo's healing relationship to T'seh, a mountain spirit. T'seh and her male companion offer Tayo refuge after he loses his horse, and his psychological wounds from World War II heal by living on the land with T'seh and learning the plants while reestablishing a connection with the land. Tayo's relationship with the land is modernized with the recognition of uranium mines as part of the healing ceremony that Tayo undergoes. While uranium mining illustrates destruction and settler colonial goals, the incorporation of it into Laguna understandings of place demonstrates how Indigenous societies continue to face changes in creative ways that allow their persistence and reject settler colonial aims of erasing Indigenous connections to the land. Silko's approach to Indigenous education reaffirms the role of settler colonialism and the creative ways Indigenous people responded.

Silko provides a nonlinear portrayal of the influences within Tayo's life, and one significant factor that she continues to broach is education. Tayo connects his traumatic wartime experiences with his educational background. Silko writes: "He had believed in the stories for a long time, until the teachers at Indian school taught him not to believe in that kind of "nonsense." But they had been wrong. Josiah had been

there, in the jungle; he had come.”⁴¹ Silko’s connections of Tayo’s education with one of his most traumatic wartime experiences highlights the psychological trauma that occurred in schools and warfare, linking the dislocation Tayo experiences in both areas. She further frames Tayo’s school experiences in comparison to his cousin Rocky, who embraces Western education in his dreams for success and moving away from the Laguna Pueblo Reservation.⁴² Rocky succeeds in sports and academia on settlers’ terms, while Tayo steadfastly continues to carry out traditional Indigenous ceremonies, such as treating a hunted deer with respect. Importantly, Tayo questions the influence of Western epistemologies and environmental practices while adhering to traditional Laguna values. Tayo’s connection to his nonhuman relations, including the rain, water, land, plants, and animals illustrates how he rejects Western systems of thought and accepts the validity of sacred knowledge. Tayo reflects upon what he learned in school in the following passage: “[T]he science teacher had explained what superstition was. . . . He had studied those books, and he had no reasons to believe the stories any more.”⁴³ Despite this, Tayo considers a spider drinking and its relationship to the land and concludes, “Everywhere he looked, he saw a world made of stories.”⁴⁴ Tayo refuses Western education and continues to respect Laguna ways of knowing the world, even when his beliefs contradict what he has learned in school.

Silko’s comparison of Tayo and Rocky’s school experiences should be understood in the context of American schooling as a settler colonial structure. By the 1880s, the United States had implemented the reservation policy that confined Indigenous peoples onto limited land bases. American reformers intended reservations to serve as sites of change where Indigenous peoples would learn how to accommodate to American ways of life and eventually assimilate into the body politic. Policymakers envisioned the eventual disappearance of reservations and the assimilation of Indigenous peoples, which would erase Indigenous sovereignty and difference within the American “melting pot.” The creation of schools to assimilate Indigenous children often accompanied the implementation of reservations. The 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie provides a case in point. Article 7 reads:

In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted, especially of such of

them as are or may be settled on said agricultural reservations, and they therefore pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school; and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation is strictly complied with.⁴⁵

The provisions for education within the treaties resulted in Indigenous children not only being offered an American education, but often forcefully required to attain one with the goal of separating them from their communities and changing the way they viewed the world. Off-reservation boarding schools, local boarding schools, and day schools provided the environment for the experiment to “Kill the Indian and save the man,” an expression coined by Richard Henry Pratt, who established Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which became the prototype for Indian schools across the nation.⁴⁶ The first class of Indigenous children sent to Carlisle included students from Laguna Pueblo.⁴⁷ Congress funded this grand design, originally assigning \$20,000 for this endeavor in 1877, and raised the amount to just short of \$3 million in 1900.⁴⁸ Most Puebloan children attended the Albuquerque Indian School, which opened in 1881, or the Santa Fe Indian School, which commenced in 1890.⁴⁹ American authorities at all levels—teachers, Indian agents, and congressmen—implemented a policy of detribalization, in which Indigenous children would sever ties to their home communities and adopt American ways of life. Importantly, the removal of Indigenous children also disrupted the kinship ties that guided Indigenous communities. English professor Daniel Heath Justice describes the bonds of kinship, explaining, “it can be about extra- or even non-biological cultural and community relationships, chosen connections and commitments, as well as political, spiritual, and ceremonial processes that bring people into deep and meaningful affiliation.”⁵⁰ American officials intended to destroy the various connections that tied Indigenous children to their communities and permanently assimilate them into the body politic. As officials brought the children into the schools, they immediately began to Americanize them. Educators cut their hair; American clothes replaced Indian ones, and English became the only acceptable form of communication. Teachers imposed rigid educational standards and expected the children to strictly adhere to the rules. The implementation of reservations and boarding schools comprised structures of settler

colonialism. While reservations most often served to dispossess Indigenous nations of much of their land base, achieving the settler colonial goal of land possession, Indian schools would eliminate the continuation of Indigenous societies with the disruption of cohesive Indigenous communities.⁵¹

Silko critiques the settler colonial goal of elimination through the school system in *Ceremony*. Through the experiences of Tayo, who continues to adhere to Indigenous systems of belief and illustrates that their practice validates the reality of Indigenous life, Silko shows that Indigenous children did not forget their cultures, kinship ties, or completely embrace American culture at the expense of their own. Silko's inclusion of Rocky as a comparative further confirms her critique. Despite Rocky's decision to embrace American ways and his successful navigation of school and the military, his death symbolizes the insufficiency of assimilation. The Americanized Rocky who intends to leave the reservation behind does not have a future. In contrast, Tayo embraces Indigenous ways of knowing and reconnects to traditional lands, his family and community, and nonhuman relations, including powerful Indigenous spiritual beings. Tayo survives the trauma of boarding school, and his healing and survivance embody a Laguna future, signifying Silko's literary nationalism. Tayo's actively practiced kinship contradicts the objectives of the settler colonialism envisioned by school officials, and Silko deliberately extends this into his military and post-military experiences.

Tayo's reconnection and educational experiences also illustrate how *Ceremony* provides a tribalogy of Indigenous experiences. Various Indigenous peoples resisted American schooling. For example, in 1894, when Hopi parents of Oraibi refused to hand their children over to be educated at government schools, American soldiers arrested nineteen Hopi men and incarcerated them in the infamous Alcatraz prison in an attempt to force their compliance.⁵² Government schools interrupted traditional Puebloan practices to educate their children and prepare them to be part of the community. Off-reservation boarding schools, such as the Santa Fe Indian School and Albuquerque Indian School served Puebloan children and threatened the influence of Indigenous elders in shaping future generations.⁵³ In addition, psychiatrists have found that boarding school experiences have had a generational effect on the mental and medical health of Indigenous peoples.⁵⁴ Silko captures the trauma of Indigenous peoples who went to American

schools. She portrays Grandma as the keeper of traditional knowledge who continues to adhere to the old ways, while Auntie has embraced American forms of knowledge as the only means for her son to succeed. Tayo experiences the push and pull of traditional and Western systems of knowledge. Silko depicts the lived experiences of Indigenous families who dealt with the difficulties Indian boarding schools introduced to their communities, effectively weaving American schooling into the tribalography of Indigenous nations in general and the Laguna People specifically. Silko continues to integrate the reality of Indigenous experiences into her story by examining how World War II affected Indigenous communities.

Indigenous peoples engaged in the war efforts during the 1940s and fought against the Axis Powers of Germany, Japan, and Italy. Even before the U.S. declared war on Japan after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Indigenous people supported efforts to militarily prepare. On September 20, 1940, Congress passed the Selective Service Act, creating the nation's first draft during a time of peace. While many Indigenous people faced discrimination within the U.S. and lived in states that denied them the right to vote, they overwhelmingly responded favorably to the call of duty, and many enlisted outside of signing up for the draft.⁵⁵ Among the Pueblo, 213 enlisted out of a population of 2,205.⁵⁶ The high rate of Indigenous participation led one observer to state, "If the entire population enlisted in the same proportion as Indians, there would be no need for selective service."⁵⁷ *Ceremony* reflects this Indigenous history. Tayo's cousin Rocky welcomes the chance to serve in the military, and ensures that Tayo will participate with him, even claiming Tayo as his brother for the first time.⁵⁸ This fraternal relationship underscores the kinship obligation between Rocky and Tayo that expands beyond the reservation's borders. Tayo's schoolmates Emo, Harley, and Leroy also enlist. Enlistment offered a way for Indigenous peoples to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States and gain personal acclaim for their military exploits.⁵⁹ Indigenous nations often responded to the US declaration of war by issuing their own declarations, demonstrating their sovereignty and determination to fight the Axis Powers.⁶⁰

Indigenous servicemembers contributed to the war effort in several ways. Chester Nez's work as a Code Talker exemplifies one of the most well-known and celebrated ways that the Navajo gave to the war effort. While four hundred Navajos served as Code Talkers, hundreds more

participated in the military throughout the European and Pacific Front, and many Indigenous peoples gained recognition for their bravery. On an individual basis, Indigenous soldiers demonstrated their heroism. For example, Osage General Clarence Tinker personally led a counter-attack of bombers against the Japanese when they assaulted American forces at Midway. Tinker was killed in action after refusing to give the task to anyone else, and he posthumously received the Distinguished Service Medal.⁶¹ Private Ben Quintana, a Keres from Cochiti Pueblo, died in battle defending his division's parameter, and earned the Silver Star.⁶² Choctaw Lieutenant Colonel Edward Ernest McClish served in the Philippines and refused to surrender when the majority of American forces did so in 1942 and subsequently faced the infamous Bataan Death March. McClish became one of the leaders of the guerrilla forces who continued to harass the Japanese within the Philippines, instigating more than 350 attacks on the forces of the Rising Sun and killing an estimated 3,000 enemy troops.⁶³ Indigenous peoples served in all branches of the military during WWII, and their participation earned them acclaim at home, but did not ensure an end to encountering settler colonialism.

Silko captures the experiences of Indigenous servicemen in *Ceremony*, and unlike the media portrayals of heroism during World War II, she illustrates how warfare devastated people's lives. Silko frames war as damaging and as part of the evil that witches have unleashed upon the world. Tayo, Rocky, Harley, Leroy, and Emo all experience the terrors of war and have encounters that damage their souls. Silko opens her book with Tayo suffering combat fatigue, what would today be identified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Tayo remembers the horror of shooting captured Japanese soldiers, one of whom he identifies as his uncle Josiah. While the other soldiers explain his mental anguish as a result of malarial fever, Tayo continues to feel responsible for killing Josiah despite the impossibility of the man's physical presence. Silko writes Tayo as a survivor of the Bataan Death March, a 65-mile journey of American and Filipino servicemen to Japanese prison camps after the surrender of American forces in the Philippines. While Tayo survives this horrific event, a grenade injures Rocky, and he dies on the march, possibly after a Japanese soldier stabs him.⁶⁴ Tayo's grief permeates the pages and continues upon his return home to Laguna Pueblo, where he struggles to readjust to civilian life and the loss of his cousin and uncle.

Unlike the positive wartime propaganda that cleansed wartime images of their brutality, Silko forces readers to contend with the difficulties Indigenous soldiers experienced as a result of their service. Soldiers, such as Akimel O'dham Ira Hayes, often failed to cope effectively with their wartime exploits. Ira Hayes became famous as one of the Marines who raised an American flag on Mount Suribachi at Iwo Jima and was then tasked with selling war bonds. Hayes struggled with the attention and pressures of the war and its aftermath, and he ultimately became an alcoholic who died a premature death at thirty-three.⁶⁵ Tayo and his friends, Harley, Leroy, and Emo, embody the struggle of veterans to cope with the aftermath of war and the mental anguish that accompanies it. After the war, Harley and Leroy turn to drinking alcohol and telling war stories to work through the reality of returning to the reservation and losing the status they had achieved during wartime. Harley and Leroy encourage Tayo to drink and reminisce with them in order to return to normalcy. In contrast, Emo demonstrates the continuing violence of the war by playing with the teeth of Japanese soldiers and, eventually, torturing and killing Harley. The psychological pain of each man captures the real experiences of Indigenous veterans who often returned from war with significant mental and physical trauma.

While Silko frames Tayo's story as occurring in the aftermath of World War II, she wrote *Ceremony* during the time that Vietnam War veterans returned to the home front. Unlike the praise that World War II soldiers received, the public often scorned Vietnam War veterans, even spitting on them and calling them baby-killers.⁶⁶ One quarter of all eligible Indigenous people served in the Vietnam War and faced the discouraging, guerilla-style combat that physically and psychologically scarred tens of thousands of veterans.⁶⁷ Vietnam veterans experienced PTSD at higher recorded rates than soldiers in any prior war.⁶⁸ Silko reflects the lived, psychological angst of Vietnam War veterans in Tayo's story and provides a much more scathing critique of American warfare than World War II, commonly called the "Good War," usually receives. For example, Silko's critique of the effects of warfare and her portrayal of Tayo's identification of Uncle Josiah with a Japanese soldier reflects the real-life experiences of Indigenous soldiers who served in Vietnam and complicates the dichotomous good versus evil of the Allies against the Axis Powers in World War II. One Native infantryman who served in Vietnam explained his own encounter with a Vietnamese

man who approached him after the soldiers burned his home: “The old man looked at the soldier, compared their skin and hair color, and said: ‘You . . . me, same-same.’”⁶⁹ The identification of Indigenous soldiers with Vietnamese civilians and the parallels they ascertained in the colonial pursuits of the United States in Vietnam with the settler colonialism they experienced at home finds an outlet in *Ceremony*. Along with the context of the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Silko also wrote during a time when the United States finally rejected termination and promoted self-determination as Indigenous policy.

In the 1950s, US policymakers conceived of termination as a means to legislatively assimilate Indigenous peoples and eliminate Indigenous nationhood. Americans believed that the successful Indigenous participation in World War II in the military and on the home front demonstrated that Indigenous peoples no longer needed reservations. Indigenous veterans contributed to this idea as many demanded the opportunity to fully participate in mainstream society. One veteran posited, “I was good enough to fight for my country. I am good enough to own property and support my family.”⁷⁰ The progressive American Indian Federation echoed these sentiments, and quickly congressmen joined in with demands to “emancipate” Indigenous residents from reservations. In 1947, Congress initiated the Hoover Commission to study government efficiency, including within Indian policy. The Hoover Commission found that “Assimilation must be the dominant goal of public policy.”⁷¹ Under the leadership of the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Dillon S. Myer, who previously oversaw the War Relocation Authority, which interned more than 110,000 Japanese Americans during World War II without due process, assimilation became the *modus operandi*. Myer supported the voluntary relocation of reservation residents to cities to incorporate them into the mainstream and disparaged tribal governments and reservation communities. His attitude set the stage for House Concurrent Resolution 108.

On August 1, 1953, Congress passed HCR 108, which officially established a policy of termination, ominously touted as the “final solution” to Indian policy.⁷² This termination policy proposed to end federal responsibility over Indian tribes with all due speed and subject Indigenous peoples to the general laws of the land. Essentially, tribes would lose their federal status, Indigenous communities would lose their nationhood, and Indigenous peoples would be permanently assimilated

into American society. Congress eagerly moved forward with this policy, terminating 113 tribal nations, which affected 1.3 million acres of reservation land and more than 11,000 Indigenous people.⁷³ Rather than liberating Indigenous peoples, termination impoverished communities, leaving Indigenous people without health care, facing land loss, and subject to increasing unemployment rates. Historian and law professor Charles Wilkinson provides an apt synopsis: "There were no success stories among the terminated tribe."⁷⁴

Indigenous peoples refused to accept the permanence of termination and struggled to regain their tribal nationhood and reestablish their former federal relationship. These efforts continued throughout the 1960s, and in the 1970s, these efforts came to fruition. President Richard Nixon announced his support for self-determination in his "Special Message on Indian Affairs" to Congress in 1970, and Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act of 1975, which allowed tribal governments to oversee federal initiatives.⁷⁵ These victories came at the behest of the tireless lobbying and activism of Indigenous peoples, and *Ceremony* manifests this political action.

Leslie Marmon Silko wrote in the aftermath of the termination policy and Vietnam War and when tribal nations and the federal government embraced self-determination. *Ceremony* exhibits these contemporary trends. Tayo embodies the real struggles of Indigenous veterans who returned to their communities with PTSD and engaged in traditional healing ceremonies to address the psychological wounds they carried from warfare. Tayo's embrace of Indigenous knowledge and tradition allows him to move forward in the modern world. Tayo's time in the military hospital and the oversight of medical doctors fails to restore Tayo's mental health. Harley, Leroy, and Emo try to deal with their own sorrows by drinking alcohol and seeking material comforts, such as buying a new truck, but in the end, only Tayo overcomes his mental anguish by turning to the old ways. Tayo relies on the medicine men Ku'oosh and Betonie to provide him direction and undertake a healing ceremony. Notably, Betonie explains that the ceremonies change, but their power remains intact.⁷⁶ Indeed, Tayo carries out a modern ceremony that incorporates the landscape where uranium mining occurs, but respects sacred traditions, learning from T'seh to reconnect with the land, plants, and animals. Silko's portrayal of Tayo's healing alludes to the continuing value of traditional sources of sacred knowledge

and ongoing relationships with other-than-human beings and kinship among Indigenous peoples.⁷⁷ Silko demonstrates how Tayo and his family enact self-determination, ignoring the unjust boundaries that white settlers claimed on Laguna land and discounting the inadequate Western science and assimilative culture that failed to heal Tayo. It is only by truly demonstrating his obligations to his family and community that Tayo heals and can positively look ahead to the future. This storyline reinforces the value of self-determination that Indigenous peoples had finally achieved in the 1970s.

In summation, Leslie Marmon Silko provides a tribalography of the Laguna Pueblo while capturing the wider experiences of Indigenous peoples in America throughout much of the twentieth century in *Ceremony*. The novel also encapsulates Native literary nationalism by countering American jurisdiction, possession, and eliminatory practices. Silko introduces readers to Laguna values and challenges American efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples and Western solutions for the healing that warfare necessitates. While the framework of settler colonialism did not originate until after Silko's novel, her writing and that of other Indigenous writers and scholars provide the critiques and context that identified settler colonial processes and Indigenous resistance. The experiences of actual Indigenous people, such as Chester Nez, are reflected in stories such as Tayo's and allow readers an insightful look into the ongoing relevance and worth of Indigenous societies and worldviews. After undergoing the Holy Way ceremony, Chester Nez explained, "I believed in the power of the ceremony, knowing that if one believed, it would work."⁷⁸ Silko provides a tribalography that exudes a belief in the wisdom of the past and a successful present and future for Laguna Pueblo and the veterans that carry the weight of their service.

DR. MARY LUDWIG is Assistant Professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She teaches classes on Indigenous history, American history, and the history of the North American West. She is currently revising her book manuscript titled *Incarcerated Nations: Confinement, Removal, and Policing on the Colorado River Indian Reservation* for publication.

NOTES

1. Kenneth William Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian* (: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 145. Chester Nez and Judith Schiess Avila explain that

in 1942, an estimated thirty-one non-Natives spoke the Navajo language, and because the language remained unwritten at the time, it was an ideal language to employ as the code in *Code Talker: The First and Only Memoir by One of the Original Navajo Code Talkers of WWII* (Berkley Caliber, 2011), 90–91. While the military initially used the Navajo language in 1942, the military utilized Indigenous languages such as Choctaw, Osage, Cheyenne, Lakota, and Comanche to transmit messages during World War I. For more on Indigenous participation in World War I, see Thomas A Britten, *American Indians in World War I: At War and at Home* (University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

2. For an overview of the cultural genocidal intentions of American educational policy, see David Wallace Adams examines boarding schools as a means to eliminate Indigenous peoples in *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928*, 2nd ed. (University Press of Kansas, 2020).

3. Nez and Avila, *Code Talker*, 41–62.

4. *Code Talker*, 216.

5. *Code Talker*, 227.

6. *Code Talker*, 251.

7. *Code Talker*. A hogan is a traditional, circular Diné dwelling.

8. Joseph P. Gone affirms the success of Indigenous healers and ceremonial practices in addressing the traumas of Indigenous peoples in “Indigenous Historical Trauma: Alter-Native Explanations for Mental Health Inequities,” *Daedalus* 152, no. 4 (2023): 130–50. Richard J. McNally explains that American doctors discounted long-term post-traumatic stress disorder in World War II veterans, but the Vietnam War led to doctors identifying PTSD as a medical condition in 1980 in “Is PTSD a Transhistorical Phenomenon?,” in *Culture and PTSD Trauma in Global and Historical Perspective*, ed. Devon E. Hinton and Byron Good (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 117–34, esp. 120. The failure to recognize PTSD as a long-term medical condition contributed to a lack of resources for Indigenous veterans in the medical community. R. Scott Sheffield and Noah Riseman provide a comparative analysis of Indigenous experiences in World War II in *Indigenous Peoples and the Second World War: The Politics, Experiences and Legacies of War in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Sheffield and Riseman address the common practice of Indigenous peoples engaging in purification ceremonies for returning veterans. Al Carroll documents the prodigious engagement in ceremony that veterans engaged in following World War II in *Medicine Bags and Dog Tags: American Indian Veterans from Colonial Times to the Second Iraq War* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 118–30.

9. Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Literary Companion* (McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011), 9.

10. Ismail Ibrahim, “Leslie Marmon Silko Saw It Coming,” *The New Yorker*, April 16, 2023.

11. LeAnne Howe, “On Prose and Poetry: Part of the Story of America: A Tribalography,” *Tribal College* 27, no. 1 (2015): 31.

12. Leslie Evans asserts that her father, Robert Leslie Evans, provided the inspiration for the fictional Tayo in “Robert Leslie Evans: A Real-Life Model for Tayo in

Siko's Ceremony," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 28, no. 1 (2004): 15–22. Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin affirm that Leslie Marmon Silko witnessed the return of World War II veterans who struggled with alcoholism and battle fatigue in "The Origins of Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony," *The Yale University Library Gazette* 83, nos. 1–2 (2007): 23–30, esp. 24–25.

13. Simon J. Ortiz contextualizes *Ceremony* within the movement for American Indian Literary Nationalism that incorporates Indigenous "sovereignty, culture, self-determination, experience, and history" in "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism," in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* eds. Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior (University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 253–60.

14. Jane Carey and Ben Silverstein explore the development of settler colonialism in "Thinking with and beyond Settler Colonial Studies: New Histories after the Postcolonial," *Postcolonial Studies* 23, no. 1 (2020): 1–20. Importantly, Carey and Silverstein explain that settler colonialism provides a lens to examine areas where colonizers never left, thereby providing an alternative view of postcolonialism which more aptly applies to areas where settlers failed to retain a presence. Patrick Wolfe establishes the theoretical foundation of settler colonialism in "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409. Wolfe argues that settler colonialism encompasses settlers deliberately eliminating Indigenous peoples to replace them while concurrently introducing enslaved peoples to perform hard labor. Wolfe confirms that doctrines such as preemption contributed to the Doctrine of Discovery, which undergirded settler claims to land.

15. Vine Deloria Jr. considers the roots of the Doctrine of Discovery in *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1969). Deloria illustrates that the doctrine undergirded unequal legal treatment of Indigenous nations and allowed settler societies to unjustly claim Indigenous lands. Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle further analyze the legal aspects of discovery in *American Indians, American Justice* (University of Texas Press, 1983). Steven Newcomb argues that the Discovery Doctrine is inextricably linked to Christianity in *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Chicago Review Press, 2008).

16. Susan Hill explains the gendered ties to Haudenosaunee land and affirms that "Native people belong to the land" in *The Clay We Are Made Of: Haudenosaunee Land Tenure on the Grand River* (University of Manitoba Press, 2017), 5. Keith Basso illustrates that Indigenous communities continue to claim their lands through the use of stories in *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (University of New Mexico Press, 1996). William J. Bauer confirms the connections between stories and Indigenous understandings of their homelands in *California through Native Eyes: Reclaiming History* (University of Washington Press, 2016).

17. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 387–409. Steven Newcomb elaborates on the Doctrine of Discovery as a Christian ideology that US law incorporated to justify dispossession in *Pagans in the Promised Land: De-*

coding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (Fulcrum Publishing, 2008). J. Kehaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe explain that these processes existed not only in the United States, but at a global level, including the areas of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, as part of a universal project to dispossess Indigenous peoples in "Settler Colonialism, Then and Now," *Politica & Società* 1, no. 2 (2012): 235–58.

18. Elizabeth Horan and Seonghoon Kim analyzes how tribalogy provides a decolonial methodology to assert Indigenous sovereignty and futurity in "'Then One Day We Create Something Unexpected': Tribalography's Decolonizing Strategies in LeAnne Howe's *Evidence of Red*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 25, no. 1 (2013): 27–52. Joseph Bauerkemper examines how tribalography provides a critical lens to reconfigure settler authority and incorporate Indigenous epistemologies when evaluating events in "Introduction: Assessing and Advancing Tribalography," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26, no. 2 (2014): 3–12.

19. Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior examine Indigenous literary nationalism as creative representations that embody Indigenous self-determination, epistemologies, practices, and histories in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (University of New Mexico Press, 2006). Sarah Hernandez examines Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's contribution to developing nation-centered literary analysis in "'Words Have Consequences': Reconstructing and Implementing Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's Nation-Centered Literary Theory," *Wicazo Sa Review* 31, no. 1 (2016): 64–74. Channette Romero examines how LeAnne Howe's tribalography provides an Indigenous literary praxis that underpins tribal sovereignty and supports tribal adaptations in "Expanding Tribal Identities and Sovereignty through LeAnne Howe's 'Tribalogy,'" *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26, no. 2 (2014): 13–25. Jean M. O'Brien argues that through the process of "firsting" settlers erased Indigenous ownership and history and claimed the Americas in *Firsting and Lasting Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

20. Nancy J. Peterson examines Silko's incorporation of Laguna sacred histories and sacred places in the book *Storyteller* and argues that the mixture of past and present stories generates Indigenous empowerment and futurity in "Storyteller as Tribalography," in *Leslie Marmon Silko's Storyteller*, ed. Catherine Rainwater (University of New Mexico, 2016), 39–55. Susan L. Dunston analyzes the physical, historical, and emotional connection between Indigenous peoples, the land, and the stories that encapsulate Indigenous relationships to the land in "Storytelling Science," in *Leslie Marmon Silko's Storyteller* ed. Catherine Rainwater (University of New Mexico, 2016), 21–38.

21. Lynn Domina provides a timeline of Laguna history and origins in *Understanding Ceremony: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents* (Greenwood Press, 2004), 15–16. Julie Cruikshank argues that Native oral stories contribute to Indigenous historiography and underpin the social connections Indigenous peoples have with each other and nonhuman relatives while revealing local conditions, ideas, and practices in "Oral History, Narrative Strategies, and Native American Historiography: Perspectives from the Yukon Territory, Canada," in *Clearing a Path: Theorizing the Past in Native American Studies* ed. Nancy Shoemaker

(Routledge, 2002), 3–28. Edith Swan explains how Laguna spiritual beliefs and sacred figures intersect with ceremonial places in “Laguna Symbolic Geography and Silko’s ‘Ceremony,’” *American Indian Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1988): 229–49.

22. Swan, “Laguna Symbolic Geography and Silko’s ‘Ceremony,’” 230–31.

23. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Penguin Books, 1977), 68.

24. Sharon Holm argues that Leslie Marmon Silko engages in literary nationalism by detailing the relationship between the Laguna, land, flora, and fauna in “The ‘Lie’ of the Land: Native Sovereignty, Indian Literary Nationalism, and Early Indigenism in Leslie Marmon Silko’s ‘Ceremony,’” *American Indian Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2008): 243–74. Edith Swan evaluates the ceremonial practices within *Ceremony* in “Healing via the Sunwise Cycle in Silko’s ‘Ceremony,’” *American Indian Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1988): 313–28. While Swan provides an excellent overview of Laguna ceremonies, she does not apply the ceremonies to the realities that exist outside of the fictional account. LeAnne Howe’s concept of tribalography allows readers to view ceremonies as a past, present, and future solution to Indigenous healing.

25. Domina provides a timeline of Laguna history and origins in *Understanding Ceremony*, 16.

26. Leslie Marmon Silko, “Angelita La Escapia Explains Engels and Marx,” in *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writing of North America*, ed. Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird (W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 195.

27. Colin G. Calloway explains that Juan de Oñate authorized the destruction of Acoma when Acomans denied his soldiers the goods they demanded and killed an estimated eight hundred people and enslaved and mutilated the survivors in *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 146–51.

28. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 146–63.

29. Andrés Reséndez argues that Indigenous slavery accounts for the Pueblo Revolt in *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Mariner Books, 2016), 164–71.

30. For more on Indigenous governance in the wake of Spanish colonialism in the American Southwest see Maurice Crandall, *These People Have Always Been a Republic: Indigenous Electorates in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1598–1912* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019). Kivas are the circular, subterranean sacred places in which Puebloan peoples engage in ceremony and community decision-making.

31. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 200. For more on the Spanish return to the Southwest and their efforts to reestablish a presence among the Pueblos, see David Roberts, *The Pueblo Revolt: The Secret Rebellion that Drove the Spaniards Out of the Southwest* (Simon and Schuster, 2004).

32. Domina provides a timeline of Laguna history and origins in *Understanding Ceremony*, 20.

33. James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson, *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (University of Illinois Press, 1984), 96–97.

34. Olson and Wilson, *Native Americans*, 97–99.

35. Katja Sarkowsky analyzes the connections between literary sovereignty and Indigenous land ownership and possession in “Cartographies of the Self: Indigenous Territoriality and Literary Sovereignty in Contemporary Native American Life Writing,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 11, no. 1 (2020): 103–25. Sarkowsky argues that Silko views Laguna stories as establishing “discursive authority” over Indigenous lands that reaffirm Indigenous ownership despite settler claims that legalize Indigenous dispossession. William J. Bauer examines the historical Indigenous practice of storytellers constructing a place world that tied Indigenous peoples to the land and established kinship connections in *California through Native Eyes*, 14–22.

36. Silko, *Ceremony*, 25.

37. Silko, *Ceremony*, 43. Irina Chirica examines European reterritorialization of Indigenous lands and the division of Indigenous lands for the benefit of settlers in “Conquered Landscape in the American West,” *Linguaculture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 75–85, esp. 82.

38. Nick Estes et. al. interrogate the violence, exemplified by Indian Rolling and brutal policing, in Gallup in *Red Nation Rising: From Bordertown Violence to Native Liberation* (PM Press, 2021), 37–58.

39. Silko, *Ceremony*, 117. Chirica examines Silko’s assertion that Indigenous peoples belong to the land and their reappropriation of historical lands in “Conquered Landscape in the American West,” 83.

40. Silko, *Ceremony*, 202.

41. Silko, *Ceremony*, 19.

42. Silko, *Ceremony*, 51.

43. Silko, *Ceremony*, 94.

44. Silko, *Ceremony*, 95.

45. “Treaty with the Sioux—Brulé, Oglala, Miniconjou, Yanktonai, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans Arcs, and Santee—and Arapaho, 1868,” reprinted in Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 2nd ed. (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004), 309.

46. Adams examines Indian boarding schools in *Education for Extinction*. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose explain the influence of Carlisle on the creation of publicly funded boarding schools in *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014). Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert provides a tribal level study of the Hopi and the coercion they endured due to boarding schools in *Education beyond the Mesa: Hope Students at Sherman Institute, 1902–1929* (University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

47. John R. Gram, *Education at the Edge of Empire: Negotiating Pueblo Identity in New Mexico’s Indian Boarding Schools* (University of Washington Press, 2015), 19.

48. Calloway, *First Peoples*, 345.

49. Gram, *Education at the Edge of Empire*, 19–20.

50. Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 75.

51. For more on Indian boarding schools, see Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Clyde Ellis, *To Change Them Forever: Indian Education at the Rainy Mountain Boarding School, 1893–1920* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Adams, *Education for Extinction*; Gram, *Education at the Edge of Empire*.

52. Wendy Holliday, “Hopi Prisoners on the Rock,” National Park Service, June 22, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/hopi-prisoners-on-the-rock.htm>.

53. John Reynolds Gram, “The Consequences of Competition: Federal Boarding Schools, Competing Institutions, Pueblo Communities, and the Fight to Control the Flow of Pueblo Students,” *History of Education Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2015): 460–87.

54. George “Bud” Vana and Dakotah Lane, “What Do American Indian Boarding Schools a Century Ago Have to Do with Dysregulated Children Today?,” *Psychiatric News*, September 23, 2021, <https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2021.10.40>.

55. Townsend explains that 42,000 Native Americans registered for the draft in *World War II and the American Indian*, 61. Alison R. Bernstein explains that the draft caused some degree of controversy within Indigenous communities that questioned its effect on their sovereignty in *American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 22–39.

56. Domina, *Understanding Ceremony*, 56.

57. Quoted in Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*, 62.

58. Silko, *Ceremony*, 65.

59. Townsend describes the warrior societies that traditionally existed among many Indigenous nations and links Indigenous participation in World War II with the opportunity to demonstrate military prowess in *World War II and the American Indian*, 78–79.

60. Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*, 127.

61. Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*, 128.

62. Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*, 128.

63. Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*, 132–33.

64. Silko, *Ceremony*, 44. Edith Swan argues that Tayo is a counterpart to the “mythic bear boy” in “Healing via the Sunwise Cycle in Silko’s ‘Ceremony,’” 313–28. Swan focuses on the individual healing of Tayo and the role the ceremonies play. Connecting this idea to Howe’s concept of tribalography expands the power of the ceremonies Swan describes.

65. Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II*, 49–51.

66. Vietnam veteran Frederick Downs provides his own experience of being harassed upon his return from Vietnam in *The Killing Zone: My Life in the Vietnam War* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), preface.

67. Alexandra N. Harris and Mark G. Hirsch, *Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces* (Smithsonian Institution, 2020), 141–44.

68. Harris and Hirsch, *Why We Serve*, 146.

69. Harris and Hirsch, *Why We Serve*, 145.

70. Quoted in Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945–1960* (University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 14.
71. Quoted in Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 64.
72. Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle*, xiii.
73. Wilkinson explains the Indigenous struggles against termination and efforts to reclaim their nationhood in *Blood Struggle*. Louise Erdrich provides a literary analysis of this policy in the novel *The Night Watchman* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2020).
74. Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle*, 182.
75. Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 6th ed. (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2019), 500–502.
76. Silko, *Ceremony*, 126.
77. Domina analyzes how Silko compares Western medicine to Indigenous traditional healing ceremonies in *Understanding Ceremony*, 89–99.
78. Nez and Avila, *Code Talker*, 252.

The Indigenous Final Girl in Stephen Graham Jones's *The Only Good Indians*

CYANNE SO-LO-LI TOPAUM

Abstract: Stephen Graham Jones's *The Only Good Indians* features what might be the first Indigenous final girl in slasher fiction and cinema. The final girl, and the slasher genre as a whole, has received a tremendous amount of criticism over the years, with the scholar who coined the term “final girl,” Carol J. Clover, suggesting that the character is a masculine surrogate whose narrative agency occurs through inflicting phallic violence. What makes Jones's novel striking is how its final girl, Denorah Cross Guns, does not find recourse in violence, but instead survives the novel's slasher, Elk Head Woman, by refusing to inflict harm and through her skills at basketball. Moreover, the novel as a whole represents a sustained attempt to critique Indigenous masculinity for the harm it can inflict on women and, in this way, challenges the misogyny that the slasher genre has been justifiably criticized for.

Keywords: Stephen Graham Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, slasher, horror, final girl, Indigenous masculinity.

Blackfeet author Stephen Graham Jones has described his early education in cinematic horror, consisting of slashers featuring the likes of Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees, and Michael Myers as “VHS homework” in preparation for a “test.”¹ The “test” turned out to be director Wes Craven's 1996 slasher film *Scream*. *Scream* is widely known for helping to revive American horror cinema, which was in the midst of a commercial low point at the time, and for inspiring a short-lived wave of “teen slashers” such as *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) and *Urban Legend* (1998). Wes Craven's film is also notable for Kevin Williamson's screenplay—a metatextual reflection on horror—or more precisely, slasher—tropes and clichés. The characters in *Scream* are aware of horror/slashers

and speak in a referential and allusive way about them, regularly evoking a wide variety of classic horror films. Jones has described returning to the theater to watch *Scream* six more times,² realizing “that’s where my heart was” and that if it weren’t for seeing Wes Craven’s film, he “wouldn’t have ever known that.”³ Nonetheless, Jones’s literary career did not initially focus on slasher horror. His fictional output in the years between 2000 and 2010 explored many different genres, including speculative fiction and mystery fiction. This was not in itself surprising: Jones has noted it is a worthwhile endeavor for Native writers to “traffic in the genres typically denied to Indians.”⁴ Since 2006’s *Demon Theory*, Jones has, however, increasingly evinced a clear fondness in his work for the slasher, with 2010’s *The Last Final Girl* offering a literary approximation of *Scream*’s self-referential horror. In many of his horror novels of the time, Jones’s exploration of what Rebecca M. Lush describes as “American Indian experiences and narrative themes” took a backseat to his generic experimentation, with a certain “racial ambiguity” of the novels’ characters predominating.⁵

In this sense, Jones’s 2020 novel *The Only Good Indians* represents a dramatic shift in terms of how it connects his love of the slasher with American Indian themes and experiences. *The Only Good Indians* is a novel that draws from the slasher genre Jones loves but brings forward two interesting wrinkles: (1) it uses the supernatural slasher as a vehicle for a critique of an Indigenous masculinity poisoned by colonialism and (2) it provides the reader with an Indigenous final girl, Denorah Cross Guns (very likely the first in horror history). In contrast to other slashers Jones has written both before and after *The Only Good Indians*, however, the self-referentiality of *Scream*-inflected horror is considerably muted, producing a generic ambiguity that has led to scholars classifying the novel in a multitude of ways, including “Indigenized Eco-horror,”⁶ “Indigenous Gothic,”⁷ and a “haunting” narrative.⁸ As noted by Paulina Ambroży and Alicja Kozłowska, *The Only Good Indians* is a novel that resists “easy categorizations.”⁹ In other words, while *The Only Good Indians* explicitly identifies its cast as Blackfeet and while much of the narrative occurs on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana—moving away from the ethnic ambiguity of his earlier horror novels—a generic ambiguity has taken its place. This is in contrast to the novels he wrote after *Indians*, which include the three novels comprising the “Indian Lake Trilogy” and starring the self-aware Blackfeet final girl

Jade Daniels. In this sense, *The Only Good Indians* is a connective thread between two distinct phases of Jones's literary output and is worth interrogating as an unorthodox slasher narrative.

Jones's novel seems to draw upon a number of early revenge-centered slashers, including (but by no means limited to) *The Burning* (1981) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). The latter film warrants comparison in part because the child murderer Fred Krueger returns after being burned to death by a group of parents to haunt the dreams of their children. The 1980s gradually saw a shift whereby the most popular slasher series, *Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th*, and *Halloween*, began turning the slasher villain into a kind of supernatural boogeyman (regardless of whether they started that way in earlier films). This shift was partly the result of necessity (if the killer is slain at the end of a film, then how will they return for sequels?), but it became a key source of inspiration for Jones's slasher fiction. While *The Only Good Indians* draws upon Native stories of deer woman and antelope woman, at its core it is inspired more directly by the slasher trio of Freddy Krueger, Jason Vorhees, and Michael Myers. Elk Head Woman is driven by the need for vengeance and manufactures or contributes to the demise of virtually every character in the text. She is only stopped by Denorah, the archetypal final girl.

The term "final girl" is the creation of scholar Carol J. Clover. In a 1987 article, Clover examined the slasher film despite it lying "beyond the purview of the respectable" (a quote Jones uses at the start of the novel *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*) and because it had, at that point in time, attracted very little "respectable criticism."¹⁰ Clover attempts to identify some of the major tropes and narrative forms of the cinematic slasher, providing a fascinating early academic perspective on the genre. Clover devised the term "Final Girl" as terminological shorthand for "the survivor," the "one who did not die."¹¹ It is the final girl alone who "looks death in the face" and "finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B)." As described by Clover, the final girl emerges in the closing portions of the film and becomes the focal point for the "last ten to twenty minutes."¹² Clover presents a critical viewpoint on the final girl, noting how often this type of character is "not fully feminine," but instead defined by "sexual reluctance" and her "smartness" and "gravity."¹³ She is also critical of reading the final girl as a "feminist development," believing this is a "grotesque expression of wishful thinking."¹⁴ This sentiment is echoed

by scholar Kyle Christensen, who disputes the notion that the final girl is “inherently a feminist figure” while simultaneously arguing that some final girls fit the bill better than others.¹⁵

In many ways, time has been kind to slashers. From initially being seen as “the most disreputable form of the horror film,”¹⁶ it has persisted as a cinematic form and even developed as a distinct literary genre, with Jones’s novelistic exploration of the slasher occurring at the same time as writers such as Grady Hendrix, Riley Sager, Stephanie Perkins, and Gina Wohlsdorf producing their own form of cinematic slasher-inspired horror fiction. The claim that final girls can be read as feminist figures has additionally achieved increasing credibility with popular audiences and scholars. Clover’s theorization, while regarded as important, has also received a great deal of scholarly criticism for reifying the gender binary,¹⁷ downplaying female spectatorship of horror films,¹⁸ and for neglecting the dynamics of race and ethnicity in her analysis.¹⁹ As argued by Sue Short, there is “more to gain from celebrating the Final Girl who learns to defend herself against violence” than “viewing her as a pseudo-male.”²⁰ In his slasher novels, Jones broadly agrees with this perspective, while also acknowledging the genre’s problematic conventions. He has, for example, stated that “the slasher has a bad history of the way it treats women. It’s very exploitative.”²¹ According to Jones, cinematic slashers have long struggled with misogyny, but “I definitely want to push back against that, because I think for the slasher to continue to get stronger and better, it has to drop away that useless stuff.”²² In the 2012 novel *The Last Final Girl*, Jones has his main character Izzy describe the archetypal final girl as “pure, chaste, bookish.”²³ The novel begins with one such character being characterized as the “meek survivor” and a “guilty winner.”²⁴ It is, by contrast, the lead antagonist of the slasher that “makes final girls come into their own.”²⁵ The slasher is the crucible by which the final girl makes herself into something more than she is. In *My Heart Is a Chainsaw* (2021), Jones elaborates that the final girl is defined by her “resolve.”²⁶ In the midst of “all the stalking and slashing,” the final girl is the one with “‘more’ inside her,” the one who “stands up through the heart of it all, through the fragile shell of her old self, and she goes toe to toe with this bad evil.” As described by the novel’s slasher enthusiast Jade Daniels, the final girl is a “hero for our times,” with no cinematic heroine embodying this archetype better than Constance, the protagonist of the 1981 film *Just Before Dawn*. After

watching her friends get murdered, Constance has “had enough” and “in a move not matched in all the years since” climbs onto the killer and “because she has no weapon, because she IS the weapon,” she shoves her hand down the slasher’s throat, “then she reaches in deeper, and comes out with his life pulsing in her fist.”²⁷ In his articulation of the “rules” of slasher horror, Jones demonstrates his awareness of the genre’s difficulties, but he also sees the final girl as a heroic figure, someone who is molded by the trauma and terror of her experience and transformed into an agent. His perspective aligns with Short’s, who asserts that because “certain young women survive the traumas of the slasher, overcoming physical and psychological adversity, they provide an image of self-sufficiency and resilience that sets them apart from female characters generally seen in cinema.”²⁸

Denorah is introduced to the reader as a “Finals Girl.”²⁹ She was given this nickname by her father because he viewed her as his “lucky charm” during the NBA finals when she was four. Despite the joking reference to final girls, however, it is important to note that Denorah is different from other Jones’s heroines such as *The Last Final Girl*’s Izzy or *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*’s Jade due to her lack of self-awareness. While Izzy and Jade are horror enthusiasts who know the rules of the slasher and realize they are “in” one, Denorah is a young Blackfeet woman whose characterization primarily centers on her strained relationship with her father Gabriel and her love for basketball. She measures distance by the “court length” and her first thought upon being injured by Elk Head Woman is to silently apologize to her coach since players “are supposed to save their legs for game day.”³⁰ When hiding amidst a grouping of trees, it is stated she has always believed “trees are only good to make basketball courts from.”³¹ When asked in the 8th grade to draw her “favorite holiday,” she chooses to draw “when her sister’s team went to regionals in basketball the year before.”³² Denorah’s basketball obsession is presented as a possible way out of the rez for her since her older sister was able to go to college on a sports scholarship. More than that, she is described as having the single-mindedness of the young athlete: driven to succeed no matter the cost. It is, therefore, fitting that when she is face-to-face with Elk Head Woman toward the end of the novel, her talents on the court become a means of survival against the vengeful slasher.

In “Shooting Hoops Like Magic Tricks,” David Buchanan describes the importance of “rezball” in Jones’s work and the “absolute power of

basketball as a source of communal identity and pride, and as a ceremonial response to modern life.”³³ In Jones’s work, the “story of the perfect shot” carries a tremendous power in Native communities. The showdown between Denorah and Elk Head Woman is, not surprisingly, described in mythic terms. Her court duel “isn’t just for pride,” but “for her tribe, her people, it’s for every Blackfeet from before, and after.”³⁴ When Elk Head Woman tells Denorah she plans to murder the teenage girl because she is her father’s “calf,” Denorah makes her intention to win plain by stating, “I don’t care who you are. . . . When you’re on this court, you’re mine.”³⁵ Buchanan’s “perfect shot” happens when Denorah effectively wins the game with a successful jump shot which results in her falling “back into legend.”³⁶ As a final girl, Denorah is given two weapons to battle Elk Head Woman with. One is basketball, which succeeds in keeping the teenager alive and gives her the chance to escape from Elk Head Woman. The game does not keep the spirit from chasing after Denorah, but it offers the basketball player a chance to achieve the “perfect shot” and a way to pass into communal legend. As described in *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, Denorah is the archetypal final girl with something “more” inside her, with the ability to stand up and go “toe to toe with this bad evil.”³⁷ Jones’s narrative frames her court victory against Elk Head Woman as both individual and communal triumph, even if it is not enough to stop the slasher. In a twist on the typical slasher formula, however, Jones has Denorah ultimately survive and escape Elk Head Woman with the second weapon she has at her disposal: her willingness to *stop* fighting.

Before discussing how Denorah succeeds in the final pages of the novel, it is important to set up a few things. First, we need to discuss the narrative’s critique of toxic Indigenous masculinity and the destructive effect it can have on the women in Native men’s lives. Second, as Jones frequently notes in his self-aware slashers, the dyadic relation between final girl and slasher is the most crucial element of the genre. It is, therefore, important to describe Elk Head Woman and her anger and grief. As an opening, it is worthwhile to consider Jones’s 2020 novel in the broad social context it was produced in, by which I am specifically referring to the larger Indigenous social context. Jones’s novel was written in the years after movements like Idle No More and the larger push surrounding missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls began. It arrived two years after the publication of works such as Tanya Tagaq’s

novel *Split Tooth* about a young Indigenous woman's rape and Terese Marie Mailhot's memoir *Heart Berries* detailing the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her Indigenous father. The statistics surrounding violence against Native women are staggering: "84.3 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime"³⁸ and "1 in 3 Native women will be raped during her lifetime."³⁹ In Jones's *My Heart Is a Chainsaw* (released the year after *The Only Good Indians*), he describes the impetus for that narrative arising from a news article describing "a young Native girl in Arizona who had killed herself after being molested by her (Native) father. I distinctly remember reading that article over and over, trying to make it make sense. It wouldn't, though." Jones felt a motivation to continue *Chainsaw* because, after reading the article, he had found "someone to write *against*: that father who was never a dad."⁴⁰ As the stories of sexual abuse and violence surrounding Indigenous women gain increasing attention, it is important to consider Jones's recent slashers with Indigenous final girls as being connected to this charged context. In an interview, Jones notes that he views the slasher as a "justice fantasy" that "dreams of a world where wrong is punished."⁴¹ In many respects, his recent slasher novels have attempted to use the slasher as a vehicle for thinking through and enacting a fictive form of justice on the page.

Unlike what happens to *Chainsaw*'s protagonist Jade, Denorah is not represented as the victim of sexual abuse. Her relationship with her father is strained, but this is because her parents divorced, and her dad is an unreliable alcoholic. In the final pages of the novel, Jones writes that Denorah thinks of her father and "hates that he's dead, she loved him, she *is* him in every way that counts."⁴² There is no attempt made to villainize the four men who massacred the gang of elk—they are flawed and contradictory figures—but the effect they have on the people in their lives is catastrophic. Lewis murders two women, one of whom is Indigenous. Gabriel and Cassidy accidentally shoot the boy they were trying to help by staging a sweat. They also inadvertently crush Cassidy's Native partner Jo to death with a car. At no point does the narrative ever disentangle their actions from the context of settler colonialism. The novel's first victim Ricky is killed by a posse of racist white men outside of a bar. Lewis is killed by a group of white vigilantes. The violence inflicted on these men is marked by the novel, but so is the violence they inflict on others. Anti-Native discrimination is also frequently

addressed throughout the text. Lewis's section details a moment when he meets police officers outside of his house during which he makes a very slight movement and is greeted with both cops drawing their weapons "in that shooting crouch they like."⁴³ Denorah also endures chants during her basketball games from white fans in the away end, who sing "Indian go home" and other derogatory slogans at her team.⁴⁴ The novel makes it very clear that the violence that Lewis, Gabriel, and Cassidy inflict on the Natives around them has a definite source of inspiration. Lewis suggests as much when he muses that "when the whole world hurts, you bite it, don't you?" with regard to his sick dog.⁴⁵ While Elk Head Woman is responsible for misleading the men through trickery, their recourse to violence is heavily connected to the settler colonial environment they were raised in.

The best demonstration of the friends' propensity for destructive violence is the slaughter of the elk. Early in the novel, Lewis and Gabriel talk on the phone about the massacre and describe how the elk "don't go there anymore" because "we're legends to them."⁴⁶ Gabriel jokingly refers to the four friends as "the four boogeymen—the four *butchers* of Duck Lake." When juxtaposed next to the graphic descriptions of the elk slaughter, his mirth reads as particularly callous, as a desensitized macho braggadocio without empathy or understanding. The four men act with, as Christopher Pexa has noted, a "settler's nonchalance toward tribal law"⁴⁷ and with a settler's "contemptuous disregard for elk personhood."⁴⁸ Jones counters the four friends' memories and stories about the hunt with a vivid rejoinder: the second person narration of Elk Head Woman. As noted above, Elk Head Woman is a slasher on a quest for vengeance. What motivates her is the loss of her calf. Upon discovering the dead infant, even Lewis notes that the infant was "why she was fighting so hard."⁴⁹ She had to "protect her baby." When the female elk returns as Elk Head Woman, she stalks the four friends and gradually becomes more and more powerful. By the end, she no longer needs to rely on trickery to inflict death and destruction but can instead inflict it herself. When Elk Head Woman stalks Gabriel, it is noted that "this is the first time you've seen him since that day, the air full of sound, your nose breathing in just blood, your calf gasping inside you, your legs gone."⁵⁰ She is full of anger toward those who took her calf away. The night she goes after most of the cast is described as "the one you've been waiting for,"⁵¹ a chance for her to inflict suffering on those who

did the same to her. While “you could have taken them at any point,” that is “not even close to what they deserve.”⁵² They “need to feel what you felt.” Elk Head Woman’s final encounter with Gabriel has her insist he shoot himself so he can keep his daughter Denorah safe. While Elk Head Woman acknowledges that “killing a calf is the worst of the worst” to herself, she still breaks her oath and goes after Denorah.⁵³

Jones’s decision to give the slasher of his novel a second-person perspective is interesting to consider in this context. Third person narration is used for the other characters in the text, including final girl Denorah, but Elk Head Woman is depicted as “you.” Her desire for vengeance is striking in part because it is unbounded. It was “your anger, your hate” that she “got lost” in.⁵⁴ This leads her to the decision to attempt the “worst of the worst” by going after Denorah.⁵⁵ She is willing to inflict suffering and death on Gabriel’s daughter—not because the teenager was involved in any way, but simply because Elk Head Woman’s hatred dictates that she must. The power of the emotion described in the second-person narration, the explicit rationale provided for Elk Head Woman’s violence, is worth taking into consideration when answering the question of why her narrative voice adopts the “you” perspective. The argument that the “you” suggests audience complicity is a possible explanation for the use of second person—particularly given that Jones’s novel is a slasher. In *The Last Final Girl*, the description of the killer is described as “slasher-cam.”⁵⁶ This is a reference to the use of first-person perspective in cinematic horror which dates back to Michael Powell’s 1960 film *Peeping Tom* and which has had a long life in slasher films. “Slasher-cam” (otherwise known as the “killer POV shot”) is a way to place the audience in the killer’s perspective. This can be done for multiple reasons. In slashers with a mystery component, it is used to obscure the identity of the killer (the first *Friday the 13th* famously uses it to hide the slasher’s gender). In a slasher such as the 2012 film *Maniac* (shot exclusively from the killer POV), its usage harkens back to *Peeping Tom* by making it a voyeuristic tool. In the context of *The Only Good Indians*, slasher-cam seems to have a very different function, however. Instead of deriving from voyeurism (i.e., the desire to experience the deaths from the slasher’s POV) or to keep the slasher’s identity in suspense, Elk Head Woman’s second-person perspective aims for *empathy*, for the motivations and feeling of an otherwise otherworldly, frightening presence to be made explicit. Isabel Cristina Pinedo describes the killer POV

in slasher films as validating “paranoia as a legitimate epistemological position” and suggesting that evil “lurks in what we cannot see, and we cannot trust what we see.”⁵⁷ In Jones’s novel, the reader periodically takes on the identity of Elk Head Woman through the “you” perspective, but not, interestingly enough, when she is killing. The second-person slasher-cam of *Indians* is instead only employed when the killer is between victims, when she is stalking, ruminating, waiting. The motivation for Jones’s killer POV is therefore not voyeuristic, but instead focused on making Elk Head Woman’s pain comprehensible to readers. The killer POV in Jones’s novel indicates that Deer Head Woman is “not simply a villain but rather a character speaking of the horrors faced by both Native women and the environment through settler colonialism.”⁵⁸ While killer POV can, as Pinedo notes, provoke viewer paranoia and evoke the presence of evil, in *The Only Good Indians*, the second-person POV makes the pain and emotionality of the elk mother into an epistemological position comprehensible to readers.

This is because Elk Head Woman’s desire for vengeance is viewed with sympathy in Jones’s narrative. Part of this is captured by the second-person narration, but it is also suggested by the novel’s direct comparison between the violence experienced by Elk Head Woman and that which is inflicted on two of the novel’s female characters. Lewis murders his Crow coworker Shaney because he believes she is secretly Elk Head Woman. After committing the act of violence, he is briefly tempted to undress her to check to see if “she was field-dressed” in the same way the elk he slaughtered was.⁵⁹ He is, however, interrupted by his white partner Peta, who dies in an accident that occurs because she sees Shaney’s blood on Lewis. After her death, Lewis rips into her stomach and removes an elk calf, the reincarnated Elk Head Woman who took the place of the unborn infant that had been inside the pregnant Peta. This act is later described by Gabriel’s dad as Lewis having “[f]ield-dressed” Peta.⁶⁰ These hunting allusions serve to reinforce the notion that the slaughter of the elk by the Blackfeet men is by no means disconnected from the violent deaths of Shaney and Peta. The gendered violence inflicted against the pregnant Elk Head Woman is instead directly echoed in how these two characters die. As noted by Carlos Tkacz, Jones uses the slasher and its narrativity of violence to “index the intersections among the settler-colonial violence, both historical and contemporary, unleashed upon Native American women and the environment.”⁶¹

The showdown between final girl and slasher can conclude in many ways in slasher films. It can end with the final girl vanquishing the killer through an act of cathartic violence (often by turning the slasher's weaponry against them). This is, for example, how Jones's beloved *Scream* concludes: final girl Sidney Prescott stabs her boyfriend Billy with a knife and shoots him in the head to make sure he does not come back for "one last scare." *The Only Good Indians* does not conclude with Denorah slaying Elk Head Woman, but instead with her refusal to do so. This is striking in the larger context of slasher cinema given that, even when the killer has a motive that the viewer might find sympathetic, their murder spree during the film is typically seen as irredeemable, as the means (wholesale murder) outweighing the ends (revenge). Jones's novel instead suggests that the original elk massacre that Ricky, Lewis, Gabriel, and Cass perpetuated was a true instance of the means (slaughtering an entire family of elk) exceeding the ends (a masculine desire to inflict pain). Elk Head Woman's subsequent slaughter is contextualized as an inevitable outcome, an act of retributive violence visited upon the four men and everyone around them as consequence for their slaughter of a mother and her infant. Moreover, final girl Denorah does not opt to take revenge for her father's death, but instead makes the decision to let Elk Head Woman and her newly recovered child leave in peace as a way to acknowledge the slasher's pain, the pain the audience has experienced through the second person, and the violence Denorah's father inflicted on Elk Head Woman and her calf.

It is interesting to consider this nonviolent finale in relation to Clover's theories regarding the slasher film. Clover writes that the showdown between final girl and slasher is used as a "footnote to what went before—to the quality of the Final Girl's fight, and more generally to the qualities of character that enable her, of all the characters, to survive what has come to seem unsurvivable."⁶² She also describes the slasher villain as having a "phallic purpose" symbolized in their desire to stab the victim.⁶³ When the final girl defeats the slasher, Clover claims she "unmans" the villain and effectively "mans" herself, an easy task to accomplish given the archetypal final girl's "masculine" qualities.⁶⁴ In that moment, her "incipient masculinity is not thwarted but realized (phallicization)."⁶⁵ This is partly why Clover argues that the final girl is ultimately a "congenial double for the adolescent male," one who is "not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexu-

ality.”⁶⁶ When we examine *The Only Good Indians*, an argument could perhaps be put forward that Denorah is “masculine” to the extent she plays basketball, a sport long associated with men (the WNBA in the US only having been founded in 1996), but in the context of 2020 when the novel was published, women’s basketball has a long enough history (particularly in Native communities) that it can plausibly be read as gender neutral. It is also worth noting the example of Malia Kipp, a Blackfeet citizen who “broke barriers at the University of Montana, becoming the first Montana Tribal member to play NCAA Division I women’s basketball on a full-ride scholarship” in 1992 and became an icon of Native women’s basketball.⁶⁷ Moreover, as alluded to above, Clover’s reading of the masculinity of the final girl has been taken to task for its “tendency to restabilize gendered positions in relation to horror.”⁶⁸ As Barbara Creed notes in *The Monstrous-Feminine*, just because “the heroine is represented as resourceful, intelligent and dangerous it does not follow that she should be seen as a pseudo man.”⁶⁹ Kinitra D. Brooks has also criticized the unspoken whiteness of Clover’s analysis, noting that her theorization of the final girl, while “groundbreaking,” relies on the “normativity of whiteness,” with the presumed masculinization of the final girl demonstrating a “lack of sustainability” when she is “racially read as black.”⁷⁰ According to Brooks, the pathologization of Black women’s “survival skills” and “coping mechanisms” as “masculine” leads to them being “read pejoratively.”⁷¹ The dynamic of race has frequently been neglected in slasher studies, partly as a result of what Lucia Mulherin Palmer calls the final girl’s cinematic “reiteration again and again as a white middle-class US woman.”⁷² This is a major reason why Denorah matters as an Indigenous final girl. Rather than simply “filling” a space marked for whiteness, Denorah’s Blackfeet identity reconfigures the signifying power of the final girl as an archetype. What Carlos Tkacz describes as the “liberty Jones takes with the Final Girl” by making Denorah Native is a form of generic rule-breaking that, like *Scream*, redefines what a slasher can be. It is therefore critical that Jones abandoned the ethnic ambiguity of his earlier slasher fiction since, as Palmer observes, the final girl is often the embodiment of “white, Western feminism, assumed as an ideal progressive version of womanhood that is capable of fighting against and surviving a regressive patriarchal order.”⁷³ By making Denorah Blackfeet, Jones breaks the representational rules often characterizing cinematic slashers in the past and present.

The notion that the victory of final girls over slashers involves a certain phallicization is an interesting one in the broader context of cinematic slashers and Jones's other slasher outings, but the conclusion of *Indians* provides a very different arsenal for Denorah. Instead of fighting against Elk Head Woman with a phallic blade or weapon, she uses her basketball skills and her ability to empathize with the slasher's pain. Her basketball playing is utilized to help her survive the onslaught of Elk Head Woman, while her empathy serves a very different goal. When Denorah's stepfather arrives and aims his gun at Elk Head Woman, the girl makes the decision to shield the slasher from her father and thereby end things. She does this because she recognizes the harm her biological father Lewis inflicted on the elk. Denorah's "weapons," in other words, serve very specific functions: as a means of survival, as a way for Denorah to write herself into the story of her community, and to stop the killing through the recognition of the slasher's grief and her family's culpability in it. Denorah's "Final Girl sequence" (as Clover puts it) avoids the phallic resolution common in slasher films by dispensing with the need for violence against the body of the slasher as a kind of retribution or as a testament to the final girl's "qualities of character."⁷⁴ Jones achieves this by effectively sidestepping the phallic denouement, a maneuver that speaks to the slasher genre's potential for generic plasticity and creativity beyond the strictures of form. Creed has noted that slasher films involve a "high level of replication, in terms of narrative structure and mise-en-scene,"⁷⁵ a statement attested to by comparing the form and structure of individual slasher films, which share many commonalities. Nonetheless, Jones, in his most unconventional slasher, replicates the slasher structure, punctuating his narrative with murders and concluding with a showdown between slasher and final girl, while subverting the conventions and dodging the expected resolution. Kathleen Rowe Karlyn argues that the self-reflexivity of the *Scream* series allowed for "female characters who refuse to play by rules that would diminish them" specifically because of their knowledge of the rules of the slasher.⁷⁶ Jones himself explores this type of self-aware protagonist in novels such as *The Last Final Girl* and *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*. In *The Only Good Indians*, he dispenses with self-reflexivity on the character level, instead exercising it as a creator, producing a slasher with a generic ambiguity that suggests the genre's renewability and potentiality. The slasher narra-

tive structure of kill-filler-kill-filler is reproduced, but the tropological rules and conventions are broken along the way.

Jones's finale does not affirm or reify masculine attributes in the final girl, or result in her "phallicization," precisely because it abstains from violence, instead allowing Denorah to survive on her wits, athletic skill, and ability to empathize. While Clover's remarks are perceptive regarding many cinematic slashers, *The Only Good Indians* avoids what she identifies as the pitfalls of slashers by grounding the narrative in the context of masculine violence inflicted against women. This includes the deaths of Peta, Shaney, and Jo at the hands of Lewis, Gabriel, and Cass, but also the elk massacre where the four friends slaughtered a mother and her unborn infant. Jones describes the ending of his novel as a "beginning" because the compassion Denorah displays toward Elk Head Woman, and her willingness to end the violence, is portrayed as a means by which the silent injustices perpetuated in Native communities against Native women might be addressed. It is precisely because Denorah recognizes the pain her father and his friends inflicted on Elk Head Woman, her child, and her community, that she refuses to continue the cycle of violence in the end. Christopher Pexa describes Elk Head Woman's vengeance as a validation of "Blackfeet-nonhuman politics and lifeways as continuous across time," noting that Jones frames "Indigenous death as desirable" from a nonhuman perspective because the Blackfeet men broke a "longstanding agreement" between human and nonhuman ancestors.⁷⁷ In this sense, Jones's framing of the slasher as a "justice fantasy" also reveals how Elk Head Woman's revenge constitutes a form of justice, but moreover, underlines how the most unjust human deaths in the novels—those of Peta, Shaney, and Jo—are more than just collateral damage. Inadvertently or not, they die at the hands of the Native men in their lives. Jones relies on the generic conventions of the slasher—specifically, the violence inflicted against female characters by the male slasher—as a tool to criticize a Native masculinity that models itself after settler-colonial heteropatriarchalism. Pexa observes that "the portrayal of her vengeance against Indigenous men resists any easy allegorical reading of her as exacting revenge on settler colonialism itself,"⁷⁸ but at the same time, it is the settler affect of the men that leads to the novel's violence. The Blackfeet men may not stand in for settler colonialism, but they do nonetheless perform it. It is, in other words, no coincidence that the character who very deliberately murders a Native

woman, Lewis, is revealed to be named Lewis A. Clarke. It is also Lewis who feels the greatest guilt for the massacre of the elk, describing the moment they shot down the herd as “probably what it was like a century and more ago, when soldiers gathered up on ridges above Blackfeet encampments to turn the cranks on their big guns, terraform this new land for their occupation.”⁷⁹ This description in part evokes the Marias Massacre of 1870, when United States soldiers invaded a Piegan Blackfeet camp and the “soldiers fired into the thirty-seven lodges that made up the camp, killing 173 men, women, and children.”⁸⁰ When Denorah’s stepfather stands in the same spot the four men did and has his gun trained on Elk Head Woman, she recognizes her deceased father Gabriel was “shooting into a herd of elk that weren’t his to shoot at” and signals to her stepfather not to fire.⁸¹ While her father and his friends made the choice to reenact settler-colonial violence on the elk, Denorah refuses to make the same mistake.

In addition, what makes Denorah such a striking figure isn’t simply that she refuses violence. When Jade Daniels in *My Heart Is a Chainsaw* describes the final girl as a “hero for our times,” this is not a mischaracterization of Denorah.⁸² In *The Only Good Indians*, the Indigenous final girl is depicted as not merely a hero to her community, but a culture hero specifically. As mentioned above, when Denorah is asked to draw her favorite holiday for school, she chooses to depict the day her basketball-playing sister went to regionals. Her drawing is, however, critiqued by her teacher, who asks Denorah if her drawing is “really *Indian*” or in any way honoring “your *heritage*?”⁸³ Jones directly challenges this notion that basketball is “non-Native” or disconnected from Blackfeet culture in many of his works. In Jones’s fiction, basketball *is* Blackfeet, and it matters a great deal. As Doby Saxon, the protagonist of Jones’s 2008 novel *Ledfeather* notes, “If anything else matters [besides basketball], I don’t know about it.”⁸⁴ Denorah’s father Gabriel describes her as the one who was going to “take the whole tribe into the pros, into legend.” As he puts it, everyone would “quit painting buffalo and bear footprints on the sides of their lodges” and would instead “have to learn to draw all the lines in a basketball.”⁸⁵ By the novel’s end, it is directly stated that Denorah does exactly this in the future. She becomes a star and is “silhouetted on thousands of posters all through high school sports.”⁸⁶ Denorah as final girl is a culture hero precisely

because she reveals the extent to which basketball is very much Blackfeet “heritage” and is a part of the tribe’s story. In a settler-colonial environment in which Native cultures are always depicted in decay, where recent developments such as indigenous hip-hop and “rez ball” are not viewed as additive to Native cultural fabrics, Denorah’s ability to survive death through basketball reads as affirmation of the sport’s value and importance to Native communities. Jones’s novel is also a testament to the idea that the final girl is not simply a heroic figure in the context of slashers, but capable of becoming a heroic figure for Indigenous literatures. Denorah is a Blackfeet final girl, but she is also a Blackfeet hero. In this sense, it is possible to read her character as a validation of the archetype’s enduring value and that of the slasher genre itself. As Jones himself notes, “there’s some unhealthy stuff with the slasher as well as some wonderful stuff.”⁸⁷

In the acknowledgments of *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, Jones thanks Carol J. Clover for “mapping out the final girl for all of us.”⁸⁸ In a similar respect, Clover’s theorization of both the slasher genre and the final girl provided Jones with a necessary critique of the genre he values and, furthermore, a set of rules. In *Scream*, the rules of the slasher are laid out by the character Randy Meeks, whose list emphasizes the moralistic character of ’80s slashers. Frequently derided as a formulaic and convention-bound genre, the slasher persists into the twenty-first century, continuing to produce body counts, killers, and final girls. *The Only Good Indians* continues the tradition, but also provides a recontextualization of the final girl and slasher villain. The symbolic attributes of both archetypes take on new contours and function in the narrative in ways very different from the final girls and killers of slasher films. Denorah Cross Guns is not simply an original because she is an Indigenous final girl, but specifically because she provides a possible source of inspiration for how neo-slashers can take the tropes and formulae of the genre and mold them into something that departs from the psychosexual baggage affixed to older works. In this way, Jones is able to continue the tradition of Wes Craven’s *Scream* by drawing upon one of the most formulaic, pattern-fixated genres in horror and producing a work that offers something new without, at the same time, wholly dispensing with the tropes that typify the slasher. Instead, Jones gives the tropes new signifying power and demonstrates that the final girl remains an enduring archetype precisely because her meaning is not fixed or static, but capable of reinvention.

CYANNE SO-LO-LI TOPAUM is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He is currently working on a dissertation on Native genre fiction. Topaum is a member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma.

NOTES

1. Colin Groundwater, "Horror Writer Stephen Graham Jones's New Nightmare," GQ, August 26, 2021, <https://www.gq.com/story/stephen-graham-jones-my-heart-is-a-chainsaw-interview>.

2. Stephen Graham Jones, *The Last Final Girl* (Saga Press, 2012), 210.

3. Groundwater, "Horror Writer Stephen Graham Jones's New Nightmare."

4. Stephen Graham Jones, "Letter to a Just Starting-Out Indian Writer—and Maybe to Myself," *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones*, ed. Billy J. Stratton (University of New Mexico Press, 2016), xii.

5. Rebecca M. Lush, "'Cause the Lie Becomes the Truth': Dead Celebrities and Horror Archetypes in *The Last Final Girl* and *Zombie Bake-Off*," *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones*, ed. Billy J. Stratton (University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 305–9.

6. Carlos Tkacz, "'Not the End of the Trail': Violence, MMIW, and Environment in Stephen Graham Jones's *The Only Good Indians*," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (2023), 4–5.

7. Paulina Ambroży and Alicja Kozłowska, "Native American Gothic as Third Space: Stephen Graham Jones' *The Only Good Indians*," *Polish Journal for American Studies* 16 (2022): 116.

8. Christopher Pexa, "Sovereign Flows and the Obligation of Repayment," *American Literary History* 35, no. 1 (2023): 253.

9. Ambroży and Kozłowska, "Native American Gothic as Third Space," 117.

10. Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations*, no. 20 (1987): 187.

11. Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 201.

12. Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 201.

13. Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 204.

14. Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 214.

15. Kyle Christiansen, "The Final Girl versus Wes Craven's 'A Nightmare on Elm Street': Proposing a Stronger Model of Feminism in Slasher Horror Cinema," *Studies in Popular Culture* 34, no. 1 (2011): 24.

16. Isabel Cristina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (State University of New York Press, 1991), 71.

17. Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Duke University Press, 1995), 139.

18. Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 70.

19. Lucia Mulherin Palmer, "The Final Girl at the U.S.-Mexico Border: The Politics of Saving and Surviving in *Undocumented* (2010)," *Postmodern Culture* 28, no. 1 (2017).

20. Sue Short, *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror as Female Rites of Passage* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 49.
21. Lindsay Jameson, "[Interview] A Discussion with Stephen Graham Jones," *Kelp Journal*, 14 Dec. 2021, www.kelpjournal.com/post/interview-a-discussion-with-stephen-graham-jones.
22. Jameson, "[Interview] A Discussion with Stephen Graham Jones."
23. Jones, *The Last Final Girl*, 35.
24. Jones, *The Last Final Girl*, 23.
25. Jones, *The Last Final Girl*, 62.
26. Stephen Graham Jones, *My Heart Is a Chainsaw* (Saga Press, 2021), 47.
27. Jones, *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, 46.
28. Short, *Misfit Sisters*, 48.
29. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 173.
30. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 296.
31. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 299.
32. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 141.
33. David Buchanan, "Shooting Hoops Like Magic Tricks: Rezbball in the Work of Stephen Graham Jones," *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones*, ed. Billy J. Stratton (University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 191.
34. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 267.
35. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 274.
36. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 277.
37. Jones, *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, 47.
38. "Violence Against Native Peoples," *Association of American Indian Affairs*, <https://www.indian-affairs.org/violenceagainstnatives.html>.
39. "Rape of Native Women," *Amnesty International USA*, <https://www.bidenhumanrightspriorities.amnestyusa.org/rape-of-native-women/>
40. Jones, *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, 402.
41. Groundwater, "Horror Writer Stephen Graham Jones's New Nightmare."
42. Jones, *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, 303.
43. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 79.
44. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 172.
45. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 38.
46. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 27.
47. Pexa, "Sovereign Flows and the Obligation of Repayment," 250.
48. Pexa, "Sovereign Flows and the Obligation of Repayment," 252.
49. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 73.
50. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 151.
51. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 169.
51. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 227.
53. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 249.
54. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 303.
55. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 249.
56. Jones, *The Last Final Girl*, 110.

57. Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 74.
58. Tkacz, “Not the End of the Trail,” 7.
59. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 122.
60. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 148.
61. Tkacz, “Not the End of the Trail,” 2.
62. Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 203.
63. Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 209.
64. Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 210.
65. Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 211.
66. Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 212.
67. Kyle Hansen and Slim Kimmel, “Former Lady Griz Malia Kipp’s trailblazing story still inspiring for Native American teammates,” *Montana Sports*, November 28, 2023, <https://www.montanaspports.com/college/montana-grizzlies/former-lady-griz-malia-kipps-trailblazing-story-still-inspiring-for-native-american-teammates>.
68. Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 139.
69. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1993), 127.
70. Kinitra D. Brooks, “The Importance of Neglected Intersections: Race and Gender in Contemporary Zombie Texts and Theories,” *African American Review* 47, no. 4 (2014): 464.
71. Brooks, “The Importance of Neglected Intersections,” 464.
72. Palmer, “The Final Girl at the U.S.-Mexico Border.”
73. Palmer, “The Final Girl at the U.S.-Mexico Border.”
74. Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 203.
75. Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 124–25.
76. Kathleen Rowe Karlyn, “Scream, Popular Culture, and Feminism’s Third Wave: ‘I’m Not My Mother,’” University of Colorado Boulder (August 1, 2003, <https://www.colorado.edu/gendersarchive1998-2013/2003/08/01/scream-popular-culture-and-feminisms-third-wave-im-not-my-mother>).
77. Pexa, “Sovereign Flows and the Obligation of Repayment,” 248.
78. Pexa, “Sovereign Flows and the Obligation of Repayment,” 249.
79. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 75.
80. Blanca Tovías, “A Blueprint for Massacre,” *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity throughout History*, ed. Philip G. Dwyer and Lyndall Ryan (Berghahn Books, 2012), 127.
81. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 303.
82. Jones, *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, 47.
83. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 141.
84. Stephen Graham Jones, *Ledfeather* (Fiction Collective 2, 2009), 192.
85. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 239.
86. Jones, *The Only Good Indians*, 305.
87. Jameson, “[Interview] A Discussion with Stephen Graham Jones.”
88. Jones, *My Heart Is a Chainsaw*, 403.

“Lines of Inquiry”

ABIGAIL CHABITNOY

They will ask me why I am going
If they ask me why I am going
I will say
I want to see where to begin
I will say I want to see where the world ends
where the world begins again

But really, though, between you and me
What are your intentions?
What are your motives?
Why are you here?

Will it matter :: the shore
in the end?

Aang :

Hunger a many valved heart

Line upon line
And what else : light?





It is no great feat indeed
It is easy to lose count
Of an insignificant number

//[to perform:]

Position the women where they might be
Propositioned
By the coming tide



And what am I to do
with the blades I have collected?



Expand the ribs.

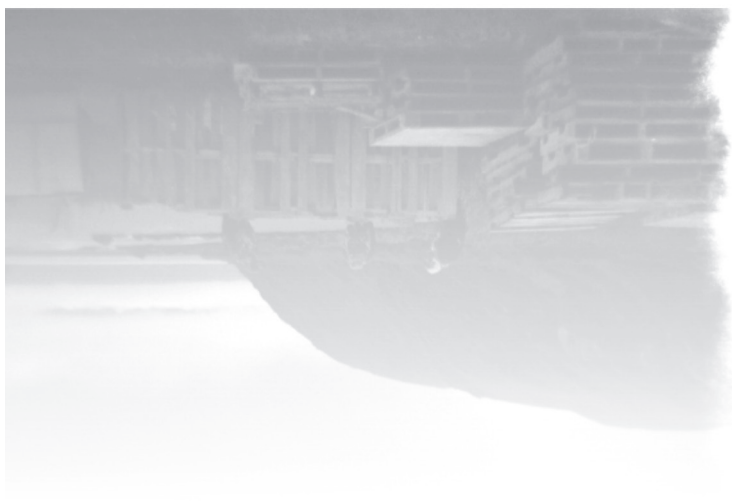
Break the glass.



Where are my dead?
Where
do I go on
living?



And what if I have gone too far?



Down the neck along
which I've been wringing
my hands over fish
when I have already become bird
sent east to live
and living
still



*This living too
is ceremony*

What else crawls upon this earth?

We have forgotten

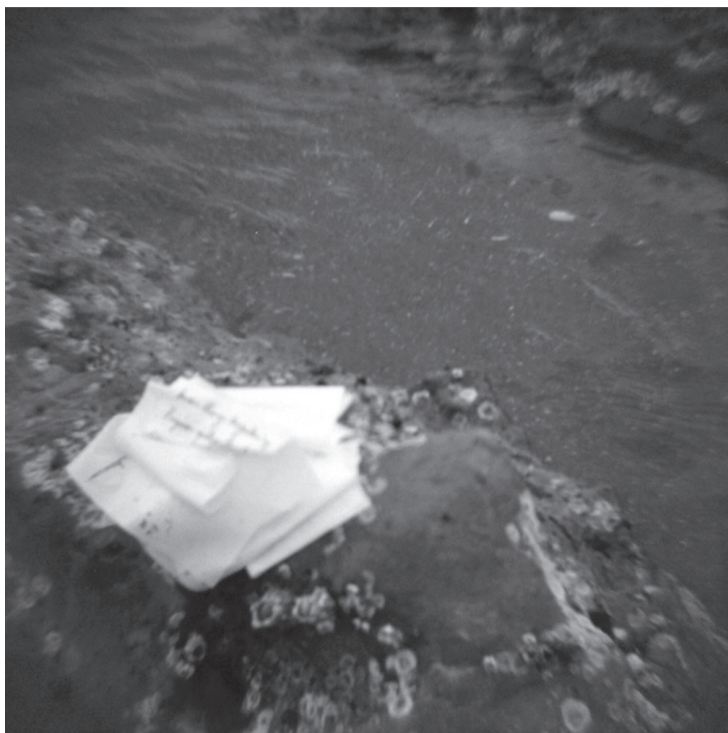




How far I imagine I will have gone
from the curve of my ark
upon my hip
the press of her
small feet in my side ::



My feet are itching
the bottom of my feet are itching
they will ask
what does it mean ::



I cut my hair at the neck
each time I swim home
with the fish :::

What enters the water foreign or
forging

foraging
the untamed shore foiled
in the wind the imposition
long ago passage–

It was as far as any place
I had gone :: *pirpak*

What enters the water
if I let go do I
contribute to the water's ire :
floating gyres of refuse
if I am refused

what then? the world
grows
a little
leaner :: *ugalluku*

Those who never told me stories
I never asked :::

What are the limits
of a geological understanding
of the sure line?

Naamaluni.



ABIGAIL CHABITNOY currently teaches at the Institute of American Indian Arts low-residency MFA program and is an assistant professor at UMass Amherst. Abigail is a member of the Tangirnaq Native Village in Kodiak. Find her and her publications at salmonfisherpoet.com.

Tobacco, Snakes, and Wolves

Uncoiling Sovereignty from the Erotic in
Drowning in Fire by Craig Womack

HANN SCURLOCK

Abstract: The theory of “the sovereign erotic” has dominated queer Indigenous discourse for the last decade. However, there are limitations to the term in its reliance on body sovereignty. There are many thematic representations of Mvskoke sovereignty in *Drowning in Fire* by Craig Womack; nevertheless, the novel shows limitations to using the word “sovereignty” to describe the power of the queer Indigenous erotic. In this article, the author is interested in the balance between the sovereign and the erotic rather than the conflation, articulating this balance by mapping queer Indigenous studies onto the Mississippian cosmos to consider the distinctions and relations of sovereignty and the erotic. The argument is tethered to Craig Womack’s 2001 novel *Drowning in Fire*, which presents dual and fluid examples of Mvskoke sovereignty and the erotic in the natural world through tobacco, wolves, and snakes to visualize queer Indigenous futures.

Keywords: sovereign erotic, queer Indigenous Studies, Mississippianism, Southeastern Woodlands, complementarity

The theory of “the sovereign erotic” has dominated queer Indigenous studies discourse for the last decade. Though this discourse has been essential to opening conversations about the colonizing nature of cis-heteronormativity, and the importance of queer Indigenous peoples in tribal communities, it has limits in conceptualizing the full potential of the erotic. Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Nation scholar Audra Simpson explains that the discourse of sovereignty in Indigenous studies is a “critical language game” that cannot be abandoned, however, sovereignty has become the grounds for various claims in the field that do not always

correlate to tribal sovereignty.¹ In this article, I argue that sovereignty and the erotic are different yet complementary by correlating these concepts to the Mississippian Above and Below worlds. Josh and Jimmy in Craig Womack's *Drowning in Fire*, along with other queer Indigenous subjects, balance the Above World, or the sovereign and orderly world and the Below World, or the erotic and fluid world, while dwelling in the Middle World. As I demonstrate in the following pages, the erotic and sovereignty are essential on their own terms while remaining complementary to each other. However, the popular queer Indigenous studies term "sovereign erotics" flattens this complementarity by conflating the terms. Therefore, in this essay, by examining Mississippian and Mvskoke metaphors of tobacco, wolves, and snakes in *Drowning in Fire*, I articulate how queer Indigenous subjects *balance* sovereignty with the erotic as a critical turn in queer Indigenous studies.²

"Mississippian" is the name archeologists gave to the southeastern Indigenous context between 900–1700 CE that was organized by "chiefdom" political organizations.³ Archeologists believe that the Mississippian World collapsed somewhere around 1700,⁴ shortly after Hernando de Soto and other Spanish conquistadors arrived in the South.⁵ However, many historians and tribal members assert the continuance of Mississippianism into the 1800s, and many aspects of the politic and cosmogony exist in tribal nations today.⁶ The Mississippian cosmos comprises three worlds: the Above World, the Below World, which are opposites, and the Middle World, where humans live. The opposing worlds are not morally bound to "good" and "evil," like Judeo-Christian beliefs bind the two, but rather, in the Mississippian cosmos, they are "complementary halves of a whole."⁷ The Above World represents order, structure, predictability, and limits, while the Below World represents change, disorder, and fertility.⁸ It is important to recognize that the Above World and Below World are not binaries, but rather, their complementarity emphasizes their relationality to the other. As I show in my analysis of *Drowning in Fire*, the Above World and the Below World coexist alongside each other in relation. In queer Indigenous studies, Cherokee Nation scholar Daniel Heath Justice has mapped the Mississippian cosmos onto queerness in Southeastern Indigenous communities, specifically through the Mississippian figure of the anomaly, who has the power to live between worlds by embodying features from opposing worlds. Anomalies are powerful and queer in their refusal to fit into a category. Justice explains

that these categorizations are not rigidly conceived binaries; beings can change shape and move between worlds through “various transgressive acts and proper ceremonies.”⁹ Though historically, the cosmological categories of Above, Below, and Middle worlds are specific to the beings that traverse them, in our modern context, this cosmological orientation is particularly pertinent in imagining how Indigenous Studies could make room for discourses beyond sovereignty.

Sovereignty is a discourse within Indigenous studies that cannot be abandoned,¹⁰ and it is characteristic of the Mississippian Above World—representing structure, governance, and order. Indigenous sovereignty categorizes the relations between Indigenous Nations and other Nations, including plant nations, animal nations, and other sovereign polities. The erotic is different, yet complementary to sovereignty, falling under the cosmological category of the Mississippian Below World, which represents change, disorder, and fertility. Categorized by watery worlds, the Below World cannot contain or order like the Above World, as water is necessarily fluid. Indigenous erotics are chaotic and sensational, rather than orderly and structured. While sovereignty is more closely aligned with the characteristics of the Mississippian Above World, it is not restricted to this realm. Fish nations and water nations assert their sovereignty, even though they belong to the Below World. As I demonstrate in my reading of *Drowning in Fire*, these worlds are not rigidly defined but remain proportionally fluid. Normative Indigenous peoples dwell in the Middle World, where the sovereignty of the Above World and the erotics of the Below World are balanced. Still, queer Indigenous peoples,¹¹ in our excess, traverse between each of these worlds, like the Mississippian anomaly. It is through this excess that queer Indigenous peoples navigate the impasse of queerphobia in our Southern homelands, our tribal communities, and US policy.

Where sovereignty is applied to the Two-Spirit erotic, it limits the radical potentials of the queer Indigenous erotic through the containment of sovereignty. Qwo-Li Driskill coined the term “sovereign erotics” to signify “an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations.”¹² Driskill articulates this concept in conversation with Black feminist scholar Audre Lorde’s theory of the erotic and Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte Nation poet and scholar Beth Brant’s understanding of the

erotic. Lorde defines the erotic as “a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire.”¹³ Driftpile Cree Nation scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt and queer scholars Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman explain, for an individual to be sovereign, they must be a sealed container, the body must refuse the co-mingling of another body—this kind of closed-off erotic, privileges individual sensation. Personal sensation alone does not heal our communities. Driskill’s conception of the sovereign erotic is bound to the individual person, rather than the People (tribal Nations). They explain that this personal sovereignty is entangled with tribal sovereignty, arguing that the body is one’s homeland prior to one’s tribal community or ancestral land.¹⁴ To me, this is a dangerous move that Driskill makes because it prioritizes the fleeting gendered and sexed body above the tribal community, which is informed by a Western humanistic and neoliberal understanding of the body. Given that Driskill popularized the use of the term sovereign erotics, I believe this term’s disruption of tribal sovereignty corroborates with their long-standing false identity claims. As Joseph Pierce (Cherokee Nation) explains in his conversation with Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw Nation), the antidote to violence are our relations, rather than sovereign body isolation.¹⁵

Furthermore, this prompts me to explore the question: Is it possible for a body to be sovereign? Billy-Ray Belcourt expands upon the idea of body sovereignty, understanding sovereignty through capacious, inherently relational erotics rather than through the “rusty category of the individual,”¹⁶ in order to refuse the individualism upheld by the colonial nation-state. Belcourt articulates that sovereignty cannot be achieved through the brevity of a body, rather that it may only be formed through collectivity. One cannot escape the violence of the nation-state solely through the body. In the context of sex, to which sovereign erotics is often applied, Berlant argues that “love always means non-sovereignty” because,¹⁷ as Belcourt explains, love requires that we “violate our own attachments, that we give into instability, that we accept that turbulence is the condition of relationality.”¹⁸ The sovereignty in the “sovereign erotic” dismisses the “chaos” of our strongest feelings in the term’s dependence on sovereignty, which is grounded in containment. As Driskill, Brant, and Lorde make clear, healing from colonial trauma is an essential component of the erotic; however, Driskill’s sovereign

erotic runs the risk of stultifying that healing, in sovereignty's reliance on the body as a container. Sensation must move beyond individual bodies to heal our communities and move us into political action. This requires a coming undone, a spilling over, an excess.

Rather than rely on the sovereign erotic to imagine alternative queer Indigenous futures, I thus articulate balance, rather than conflation, as critical to queer Indigenous lives. This correlates to what Chickasaw Nation scholar Jodi Byrd, and Choctaw Nation scholar Leanne Howe call *haksuba*—which is when the Above and Below worlds collide with the Middle World—there is a regenerative and creative force, but also a destructive one.¹⁹ Where Indigenous sovereignty requires rigid and structured relationality and the assertion of our rights, the erotic requires a submission to the other(s) we are in relation to. The erotic pulls us beyond ourselves, beyond sovereignty's "sealed container for political life."²⁰ Where Berlant argues that for queer subjects, love always means non-sovereignty, I argue that it is quite different for the queer Indigenous subject, who must hold this non-sovereignty in tandem with the sovereignty of our tribal nation(s). In the face of ongoing assaults against tribal sovereignty, tribal nations must assert sovereignty, and queer Indigenous peoples are essential to this resistance. Rather than the contained nature of sovereignty inherent in the term "sovereign erotic," the balance of sovereignty and the erotic acknowledges the uncontained nature of love while also honoring the place of queer Indigenous peoples in sovereign tribal Nations. Balance is critical to the world of the queer Mississippian anomaly, which is both excessive and uncontainable in the erotic, but also part of a sovereign Indigenous community—the sovereign and erotic duality of tobacco, wolves, and snakes in *Drowning in Fire* illustrates the queer Indigenous power of moving between these worlds.

Drowning in Fire, published in 2001, is a novel by Craig Womack (Mvskoke and Cherokee descent) that follows his influential critical text *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*. Set in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in rural Oklahoma, this coming-of-age novel is told through the perspectives of Josh Henneha, a gay Mvskoke boy and his Aunt Lucy, who supports Josh as she navigates her own childhood trauma. The plot explores Josh's journey in navigating his queerness, mainly through his relationship with Jimmy Alexander, a mixed Black and Mvskoke boy. The novel delves into Josh's struggles to reconcile his

queerness with Mvskoke culture and tradition and the Christianity he was raised with, often feeling torn between these conflicting worlds. Josh is frequently found seeking a balance between multiple diverging worlds, like the Mississippian anomaly.

The first scene of *Drowning in Fire* suggests the sovereign power of tobacco when Aunt Lucy shares the story of Mvskoke emergence while blowing tobacco smoke into Josh's ear for pain relief. Aunt Lucy shares the story of Mvskoke arrival while using tobacco smoke as medicine for Josh's earache—tobacco, in this scene, is a conduit in teaching Josh about Mvskoke sovereignty. Settler scholar John Gamber examines how this initial scene is a coupling of “a moment of healing (of Josh's earache) with a sacred story (of Creek emergence).”²¹ Through this coupling, the smoke animates the story as Josh narrates, “Aunt Lucy [breathed] smoke and stories into me.”²² Tobacco contains ancestral memories and stories that speak to Muscogee (Creek) sovereignty. Mvskoke knowledge keeper James H. Hill (Muscogee [Creek] Nation) of the Aktayahchi Clan describes the use of tobacco, stating, “When two opposing tribal towns were going to make peace, they had tobacco; they filled only one pipe with it, lit it, passed it around to each one, and everyone sat and smoked, talked with one another, and made peace.”²³ Southeastern tradition is grounded in balance, duality, and tension—which is chiefly shown through our Red and White moiety structure. The tension and duality of Southeastern tradition is rooted in the Mississippian cosmological tradition of the Above and Below worlds. Tobacco bridges the war domain of the red moiety and the peace domain of the white moiety. We use tobacco as a gesture of recognizing the sovereignty of other Nations. Tobacco transcends from the Middle World (where it is grown) to the Above World when it is passed and smoked, illustrating its importance and sovereign power. This transcendence also demonstrates that barriers do not rigidly separate the worlds, but rather, they are permeable—particularly through ceremony. Hill explains that tobacco was viewed as the leader of the land and a symbol of safety and peace when “an unknown person . . . [is] in town or in dangerous open country.”²⁴ Hill's articulation of sovereignty in this passage is mediated through tobacco. When two tribal nations come together to remedy conflict, tobacco is a necessary constituent of mediation.

When Aunt Lucy breathes tobacco smoke into Josh's body, she is engaging in a sovereign interaction. Additionally, just as Hill describes

tobacco as a symbol of peace and safety, the smoke blown into Josh's ear gives him peace as he is in pain. While Lucy blows the smoke into Josh, she shares a story of Mvskoke arrival. As Lucy shares, the smoke takes the form of fog and is situated in the story to amplify sovereignty. Aunt Lucy tells Josh the story of Mvskoke arrival, stating,

See, *a mighty fog* had covered us after we'd settled in our new home. You know, we'd just moved there after the Earth had opened up and spit us out in the beginning. We'd come a long ways. For a long time, we wandered about in darkness. And we all—some way or other out in the dark, I s'pose—got lost from one another; couldn't see nothing, and we got real scared. . . . Anyway, we stumbled about every which way, forming groups with those we touched. . . . The animals had grown so tame . . . that they had no fear of us, and they throwed in with the various bands of people. Many people and animals were wounded and in pain from falling and running into things they couldn't see, and you could hear their voices, full of hurt.²⁵

The fog that descends on the Mvskoke emulates the tobacco smoke that Aunt Lucy blows into Josh's ear. As the fog enters the story, it appears as smoke. As tobacco symbolizes safety and peace in Mvskoke culture, it enters Lucy's story, peacefully orienting Mvskoke peoples and guiding them into their clan relations. As the smoke enters the story in Lucy's telling of fog, it animates as safety for those running about lost and hurt. While the fog in Aunt Lucy's story causes navigation problems and fear, it is a necessary component to establishing clan relations. It is foundational to the creation of the Mvskoke people on Earth. The smoke has sovereign power as a tool for peace amid conflict and pain as they enter what Hill calls: "the dangerous open country."²⁶ As a relation of the Above World, tobacco smoke orients and orders in a moment of chaos—when the Mvskoke arrive on Earth. The tobacco smoke is a palimpsest in the text, full of intergenerational layers—a layer that carries the Mvskoke toward clan relations and a layer that teaches Josh of tribal sovereignty.

Josh's emergence into the queer community mimics Aunt Lucy's Mvskoke emergence story; however, in the queer community, tobacco symbolizes the radical potential of the erotic. When Josh sees the cruising site, he sees "the mist reach[ing] from bank to bank of the Cana-

dian.”²⁷ The mist hiding the men in this scene echoes the mist around the Mvskoke in their emergence into this world. Just as Josh’s ancestors scattered about the fog of the Earth in fear of where they had arrived, Josh does the same; and just as his ancestors reached and held on tightly to one another to create lasting kinship relations, Josh reaches out to Jimmy to orient his movement into this new queer world. Josh’s fear of being “devoured by these ghosts” surrounding the cruising spot made him “reach for [Jimmy’s] hand, [coiling] his fingers tightly around [his].”²⁸ Though Josh’s grasp on Jimmy correlates to his ancestors holding tightly to their kin, it differs in the scene’s relation to sovereignty.²⁹ The Mvskoke emergence story illustrates clan sovereignty, whereas Josh’s emergence into queer community illustrates a queer erotic relationship between himself and Jimmy. Josh risks what he calls being “devoured by ghosts” to share intimacy with Jimmy.³⁰ In this moment, Josh gives into the erotic by “violating his own attachments.”³¹ The scene illustrates moments of excess through the natural world; the fog descending on the men and the cruising spot along the riverside illustrate the uncontainability of sex. Gamber argues that the mist notes Josh’s emergence story as Jimmy introduces Josh to a “space reclaimed by a queer community.”³² The mist in this scene marks the uncontained nature of the erotic that Josh is coming into. As men have sex around Josh, he narrates sexual excess through natural imagery refusing containment surrounding him, such as “the river flowing behind them,” “a building on fire,” or “an accumulation of dust.”³³ The cruising scene examined alongside Aunt Lucy’s Mvskoke emergence story illustrates the differences between Mvskoke sovereignty, as “Indigenous belonging, dignity, and justice” and the erotic,³⁴ which “makes us submit to a world-to-come, to the feeling of salvation.”³⁵ Queer Indigenous subjects belong to a sovereign community, and sovereignty is an essential political project of justice for queer Indigenous peoples. However, in the body, the erotic is different than sovereignty. For Josh and Jimmy, the erotic maps onto Mississippian tradition—they move through the sovereign Above World and into the excessive and erotic Below World alongside one another. Critical to this scene is the permeability of these worlds—the Above World that is illustrated in Aunt Lucy’s story of Mvskoke emergence is gestured toward through the fog in the erotic Below World. Like anomalies, Josh and Jimmy move between these worlds freely. These two complementary scenes of sovereignty and the erotic is the mode of relation between

queer Indigenous people, inviting alternative worlds to homophobic attitudes in Christian-influenced tribal communities.

After their long night together, Jimmy wants to stop by a store to buy some cigarettes but realizes he does not have the money for them. Josh buys the cigarettes for Jimmy and hands them to him, "'Here,' I said, holding out the bundle in my hands, 'take this.'"³⁶ This gesture brings Lucy's story of Mvskoke emergence into conversation with Josh's cruise the night before. Although tobacco is a symbol of sovereignty in Aunt Lucy's story, the tobacco in this scene becomes an erotic offering. Mvskoke elder James H. Hill tells a story of the origin of tobacco, which was introduced to the land after a man and a woman had sex there, stating,

[After sex, the man] found a weed had sprouted up, and he took leaves from it, and the smell was good, and they dried in and stored it, and its fragrance, when dried, grew strong [. . .] when it had begun to develop seeds, he set the fields on fire and planted it, and when it grew, he dried the leaves, stored it, dried it, smoked it.³⁷

Tobacco, in this story, is the product of sexual relations. Josh's offering to Jimmy is akin to the sexual creation story of tobacco, given that Josh offers it the morning after their cruise. Tobacco, in Mvskoke story, is created through the process of what Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant call "coming undone," or letting go of the contained self.³⁸ Like the couple who birthed tobacco through making love with and on the land, Josh and Jimmy do the same. After their evening making love on the land, the tobacco emulates the sexual intimacies shared between the man and woman in the tobacco origin story. In Mississippian cosmogony, tobacco takes an important role in ceremony and ritual—across the Eastern Woodlands, tobacco was offered to the Tie-Snake before a trip across the water, as well as to many other beings on dangerous trips.³⁹ Josh's offering of tobacco to Jimmy is akin to a tobacco offering to the Tie-Snake—who is an anomalous being that embodies attributes of the Above and Below worlds. This could illustrate the couple's traversal across worlds. Both correlations to Mvskoke tradition here illustrate the erotic importance of tobacco and its correlation to Mississippian tradition. Josh and Jimmy's experience with the erotic produces the origin story of tobacco—their sex produces Mvskoke-ness.

Dave, Seborn, and Tarbie's affiliations with the Wolf Clan correlate to Josh and Lucy's clan affiliations, prefiguring the clan as a sovereign undercurrent of queer kinship affiliations in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. The wolf is of the Mississippian Middle World, where humans dwell. When Lucy shares the story of Mvskoke emergence, she tells the history of the Wolf Clan stating, "The first animal our family spotted was *yaha*, the wolf. We saw him first, so we call him Grandfather. . . . Of course, they's no more wolfs today. . . . I mean they aren't no clan by that name. . . . Wolfs was an old clan that died out. The others is still going."⁴⁰ The Wolf Clan is the only clan mentioned substantively throughout the novel and the only clan that Lucy elides kinship to. If there is a familial kinship correlation to the Wolf Clan, why does Lucy claim the clan is extinct? As clans are passed down matrilineally in Mvskoke culture, Lucy and her family may have lost their clan affiliations through intermarriage. However, more likely, the family may have forgotten their clan affiliations through Lucy's father's bigoted denial of her and her mother's Mvskoke identity. Lucy's detail of grandfather *yaha* in her telling of Mvskoke emergence also correlates to her "adopted" brother, Dave's clan affiliations. Lucy describes Dave as "a little Creek Indian boy who come into a bunch of oil money the year before statehood."⁴¹ Lucy's father takes Dave from his grandmother's care to gain access to his land allotment, stating, "them full-bloods ain't got enough sense to take care of their money when they get a heap of it, so they need white people to watch over them."⁴² Lucy understands that Dave is of the Wolf Clan and is particularly interested in his connections to her father's wolves. One evening, when Lucy sees Dave talking with the wolves her father stole, Dave refers to them as "brothers and grandfather and kinfolk" and opens the gate to free the wolves.⁴³ Dave's reference to wolves as kinfolk correlates to Lucy's telling of Mvskoke emergence, where she tells Josh that *yaha* is their grandfather. The internalized racism that Lucy inevitably carries could cause her refusal of the Wolf Clan, but regardless of this refusal, it is clear throughout the novel that the Hennehas carry clan ties to *yaha*. More than this though, the Wolf Clan appears to transcend the typical matrilineal formation of clan ties and rather correlates to queerness. Josh, Dave, Tarbie, and Seborn's affinities to the Wolf Clan highlight the sovereignty of queer Mvskoke peoples, which is modelled through these men's insistence on relationality to *yaha*.

The Henneha affinity to the Wolf Clan is apparent when the Medi-

cine Woman confuses Josh with Dave on one of his time-traveling journeys. Even though Josh denies his queer identity throughout much of the novel, his ability to travel throughout space and place to learn of Mvskoke queer histories demarcates him from other family members. Josh's ability to travel across time and place reifies him as an anomaly in Mississippian cosmogony.⁴⁴ Anomalies, in Mississippianism, have shapeshifting and supernatural abilities. Josh's ability to move between worlds is anomalous.⁴⁵ As Womack explains, "Anomalous beings can also be powerful; queerness has an important place. Phenomena that do not fit 'normal' categories are ascribed special powers."⁴⁶ Anomalies carry excess in their abilities to move across worlds. When Josh visits the Medicine Woman on his trip back in time, she is convinced that Josh is Dave. Josh's correlation with Dave aligns him with the Wolf Clan. Through the Medicine Woman, the Creator relays the importance of the Wolf Clan to Josh's identity. During this visit, Josh also learns that Dave is Tarbie's nephew. The Medicine Woman correlates Dave's identity to Tarbie and Seborn when talking to Josh saying, "[Dave] talks to Tarbie and Seborn because they understand him. Who do you talk to?"⁴⁷ The Medicine Woman's question here is ambiguous because she could be asking who Josh talks to about his queer identity or she could be asking who Josh talks to about being Wolf Clan. What I suspicion⁴⁸ the Medicine Woman is asking is one and the same—who does Josh talk to about being Wolf Clan—as in queer? The Wolf Clan in the novel is a Mvskoke symbol for queerness. Tarbie and Dave are of the Wolf Clan, and the novel suggests that Seborn is the same through his relationship with Tarbie. This is a queering of clan affiliation, which has been historically passed on through heterosexual relations. Womack articulates queerness in sovereign Mvskoke culture by assigning the Wolf Clan as queer. Could homophobia in the Nation have made extinct the Wolf Clan? Or at least, driven it underground? The Wolf Clan, which Lucy describes as destroyed and non-existent, appears through herself, Josh, Tarbie, Seborn, and Dave's identities as a sovereign undercurrent of queer Indigenous, non-normativity that is essential to Mvskoke tradition.⁴⁹ In this configuration, queerness is a part of the sovereign Above World through sovereign clan ties, it is not exclusive to the erotic Below World. Queerness is essential to balance in Mississippian cosmology. Josh's gay Mvskoke identity is essential to the persistence of the Wolf Clan, an integral clan to the Muscogee (Creek) nation.

Throughout the novel, the Wolf Clan is a motif for queerness in the Mvskoke community. When Lucy tells Josh the Mvskoke emergence story she explains the pain that Grandfather Wolf feels after the journey, saying, “it was this here particular wolf who tangled himself in a bramble bush, and his ear was tattered and bleeding. . . . When we saw him, trapped in thick vines next to a creek, we helped untangle him.”⁵⁰ The pain this wolf feels when arriving on Earth correlates to the pain Josh feels on the cruising path when he comes to face his sexuality. Lucy explains that the Medicine Man in the emergence story sang over the wolf saying,

*on the path he is lying
stretched out we see him
he calls out crying
hurt we see him
roaming in the darkness we see him
stretched out we see him
on the path he is lying.*⁵¹

This medicine foreshadows Josh’s fight against queerness, particularly as he embarks on the cruising spot. Darkness enshrines the cruising scene, much like it covers the wolf in the emergence story. Josh narrates an internal fight against his queerness, stating, “if I pass out [on this path], I’ll be devoured by these ghosts, stripped to the bone like a carcass surrounded by vultures, covered by the black pitch of night, unspeakable acts taking place all around me.”⁵² In this scene, Josh is overcome by the homophobia that surrounds him in his community. As Josh navigates an overt queer space, he fights against his queerness—and expresses fear in the pain queerness could cause him, given that his peers and family have expressed homophobic sentiments. Billy-Ray Belcourt expresses this overwhelming experience of walking into the love of queerness, stating, “Love has a tendency to shatter; it is prone to weakening and to running amok without notice.”⁵³ In this passage, Belcourt articulates the complexities of loving as a queer Indigenous person, where one must risk their safety for love in homophobic and racist spaces. Walking into queerness requires coming undone, stepping outside the self and risking body safety or body sovereignty. Josh must violate his bodily sovereignty to love Jimmy. Coming undone is a product of the Below World. Josh fears losing himself and being “stripped to the bone like a carcass sur-

rounded by vultures.” Though Josh projects this fear onto the gay community, those who could “strip [him] to the bone” are those homophobic community members of the church and tribal nation.⁵⁴ In stepping into his queerness with Jimmy, Josh violates his body sovereignty for the sake of his and Jimmy’s relationship. When Josh’s ancestors first encounter the wolf on the path in the Mvskoke emergence story, they risk their well-being to engage in care for their kin by “[holding] on as gently as we could, one on each leg, one on his back; one held his muzzle shut.”⁵⁵ They risk being mauled to be in a relationship with the wolf. If the Wolf Clan is the queer clan of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Josh’s engagement with queerness on the dark path also brings him back into relation with the Wolf Clan. So, while Josh is giving in to the non-sovereignty of his body, he is in tandem asserting the sovereignty of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation by remembering the Wolf Clan. Josh’s queerness is both sovereign in the Mvskoke community and requires fluidity or a giving into the erotic.

In *Drowning in Fire*, the Snakes, a traditionalist Mvskoke resistance group, are fundamental to preserving Mvskoke queer sovereignty. Chitto Harjo led the Mvskoke into resistance, and the group of Mvskoke that followed him were called “The Snakes” because Chitto’s name in English translates to “snake.” Around 1898, Harjo travelled to stomp grounds throughout Mvskoke country in Oklahoma to warn others about the allotment of Mvskoke territory.⁵⁶ The Snakes contested land allotment, which worked to break up and destroy clan and kinship systems by assigning plots of land to nuclear family units. When Josh learns about the Snake resistance on one of his time-traveling trips, he narrates, “I was still here, Jimmy was still in Weleetka, and Creek land was still waiting for us to take it back.”⁵⁷ In this line, Josh relates his relationship with Jimmy to “land back,” but more specifically, according to Mark Rifkin, to Mvskoke Snake resistance.⁵⁸ Seborn and Tarbie lived at the Hickory Grounds with the Snakes and were not treated differently on account of their sexuality. Queer couples like Seborn and Tarbie were safe among the Snakes because they honored the old ways, rather than the “white Indians” who had “accepted the ways of the whites, [and] gone along with the allotment of land.”⁵⁹ The Hickory Ground site is originally located near Wetumpka, Alabama, and is a ceremonial grounds for the Mvskoke people and the last capital of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation prior to forced removal to Oklahoma.⁶⁰ The Hickory Ground

near Henryetta, Oklahoma honors this sacred site and was the home of Chitto Harjo, and consequently, the site where the Snake Uprising was launched.⁶¹ The Hickory Grounds in Oklahoma honored traditional Mvskoke communal tenure, meaning it was a community where no singular individual or family-owned plots of land, but rather, “any citizen might cultivate as much land as he wanted, and the tribal laws protected him in his right of occupancy.”⁶² The Curtis Act, which resulted in land allotment, destroyed communal tenure. As a result, land allotments were modelled after nuclear family units. The Curtis Act did not offer land for unconventional queer families like Seborn, Tarbie, and Dave, who did not fit into the nuclear family ideal. Not only did allotment enforce individualistic land ownership under a capitalist, colonial ideology of land as a commodity but it also enforced a Western, heteropatriarchal understanding of “family” that excluded Seborn and Tarbie’s relationship. At the Hickory Grounds pre-allotment, Seborn and Tarbie fit in through their women relatives who cooked and cleaned around their fire, “To anybody passing their camp, theirs looked like all the others, women cooking under the willow arbors, Tarbie and Seborn working away from the women, following the instructions of the micco.”⁶³ Tarbie and Seborn’s relationship was acceptable under communal tenure; however, allotment complicated this because their kinship was incomprehensible through colonial law. The Snakes fought for the sovereignty of queer relations and their place in Mvskoke society by resisting the Curtis Act, land allotment, and Oklahoma statehood.

Throughout the novel, snakes, in multiple forms, are associated with Jimmy. Snakes are the Mvskoke resistance group led by Chitto Harjo, but snakes are also full of erotic energy. When the novel introduces the sexual tension between Jimmy and Josh, Jimmy takes on the form of a tie-snake. The tie-snake is both a queer anomalous being and connected to sacred Mvskoke tradition and story. Josh’s grandpa describes the tie-snake as “something in the water. Their head is shaped like a deer. If you are by water it has a power and will pull you in. . . . If you ever see a whirling water in the river you better get out of there. It makes a sound like a big snake then rises up on a sheet of water.”⁶⁴ The initial encounter Josh has with Jimmy as the tie-snake is after he nearly drowns when jumping into Lake Eufaula. As Josh struggles to resurface, Jimmy jumps in to save him. In the water, Josh sees Jimmy as a “snake, with horns, swimming toward him . . . wrap[ping] itself around [him].”⁶⁵ Though

Gamber associates the tie-snake with the Mississippian “Lower World” in his reading of the novel, the tie-snake’s association with the Mississippian anomaly is the source of queer inclusion in Mvskoke histories. Anomalies are powerful and queer in their refusal to fit into a category. They are essential in Mvskoke cosmogeny and story, which shows how queerness is important in the Nation.⁶⁶ The place of an anomaly in Mvskoke tradition illustrates how queer Indigenous peoples belong to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation; Two-Spirit identities are sovereign. Sovereignty, as Belcourt illustrates, “compels us to talk about sex as that which will free us from the maw of things that undo us.”⁶⁷ Sovereignty does not allow us to become entangled with lovers, but rather, does the opposite; it contains us into ourselves. Water in the Below World does not have this sovereign embodiment- it cannot be contained. Josh and Jimmy’s initial erotic encounter in the water where Jimmy embodies the tie-snake is grounded in the erotic. Rifkin argues that by portraying Jimmy as the tie-snake, he becomes part of “a watery domain in which the erotic attachment that draws him and Josh together is an expression not of pathology but of a capacity for transformation, recognized and respected in Creek tradition.”⁶⁸ The watery domain that draws Josh and Jimmy sexually together illustrates their place in the sovereign Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Still, this encounter also illustrates the two men’s erotic entanglements that are not mediated by the loaded term of sovereignty.

The snake’s kinetics when Josh and Jimmy have sex illustrate sovereign sexuality and erotic excess. Having been out of touch since high school, Jimmy and Josh run into each other at a party. After catching up, they go back to Jimmy’s place, where they have sex after being apart for so long. In their intimacy, they see: “snakes everywhere . . . circles inside circles. . . . A giant rattlesnake sat coiled around the copperhead and the tennis shoes, shaking his tail like an accompaniment to the swaying dance inside the circles they had made, the snakes within snakes.”⁶⁹ The snakes that appear upon erotic connection illustrate the sovereignty of queer sexuality in the Mvskoke community and the otherworldly power of the erotic. The snakes tangled together in this sexual interaction dance with one another, creating circles inside circles. The dancing of snakes in this passage is emblematic of the Stomp Dance. Stomp Dance is a ceremonial dance in Southeastern Indigenous tradition, and traditionally, women stomp with shell shakers and men sing call-

and-response songs. In Stomp Dance, the dancers hold hands with one another and spiral around the central fire. The dancers create a long line by holding onto one another, creating circles within circles, mimicking a slithering snake. The snakes circling Jimmy and Josh hold tightly to one another, mimicking stomp dancers. In this metaphor, it is as if Josh and Jimmy are the sacred fire themselves, which asserts their vital place in the Mvskoke community. As emblems of fire, Jimmy and Josh contain the prayers of their ancestors, and their sexual acts become associated with ceremony. This connection also relates to the Mississippian anomaly, which often transcends worlds through ceremony. Josh and Jimmy as the sacred fire assert the sovereignty of their queer identities in Mvskoke community.

Josh and Jimmy's sexual excess shows the uncontainability of queer Indigenous erotics. In this erotic moment, Josh and Jimmy move outside of themselves. Their bodies are entangled, and it becomes unclear in the text whose body does what, but rather, different body parts blend into one another. Josh narrates, "Clamping my mouth over his, we bared our teeth and locked jaws."⁷⁰ In this moment of sexual excess, the outside around Jimmy's house begins to dissolve and rather is replaced by a different world where snakes circle madly around the two men. In dismissing the outside world, Jimmy and Josh give into the potentialities of the future and refuse the here and now. This correlates to queerness as excess when José Esteban Muñoz explains, "Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."⁷¹ By allowing his body to coalesce with Jimmy's, and by both Jimmy and Josh's giving in to the radical potentialities that their sex could create, there is fundamental rebelliousness and expansive possibility for the queer Indigenous subject.⁷² This relationality is not embodied sovereignty, because Jimmy and Josh's intimacy abandons the idea of a body as a container and gives in to the entanglement of breath, bodies, and fragility. The circular kinetics of the snake imagine a world where queer Indigenous subjects are invited into the ceremonial circle of Stomp Dance, these snakes circling Jimmy and Josh are a metaphor for the sovereignty of queer subjectivity in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. In the Stomp Dance configuration, Josh and Jimmy's intimacy is the ceremonial fire. The world in which the snakes exist as they show themselves to Josh and Jimmy is not the ordinary world, it is a queer Indigenous future that is "not yet here," according to Muñoz,⁷³

The queer Indigenous future that is not yet here presents itself to Josh and Jimmy through their erotic excess; it is only through excess entanglements of queer bodies that new queer potentialities in the Muscogee Nation are realized.

Drowning in Fire, therefore, articulates the interrelations between sovereignty and the erotic. In the wake of the risk of losing tribal sovereignty at the hands of colonial nation-states, it is more important than ever to articulate what we mean when we employ the term “sovereignty.” *Drowning in Fire* illustrates tribal sovereignty through the collective land tenure that the Snakes illustrate on the Hickory Grounds, the persistence of the Wolf Clan despite colonial erasure, and Lucy’s storytelling of Mvskoke emergence through tobacco smoke. All these examples of tribal sovereignty also uphold the necessity of queerness in Mvskoke resurgence. Erotics are a powerful tool for reimagining queerness in the tribal community amid settler contact. *Drowning in Fire* illustrates the power of the erotic through the sexuality of tobacco, the Wolf Clan as queer, and the circular kinetics of snakes as a sexual ceremony. Mississippianism prevails in Southeastern Indigenous tradition today through balance—which is the foundation of the cosmos. There is space for balance to be applied to other specificities in queer Indigenous studies, as opposed to the filtering analysis through the sovereign erotic. By imagining the queer Indigenous erotic beyond the loaded term of “sovereignty,” there is potential to imagine alternatives to ceremonies or tribal configurations that may have excluded queer members in times past—such as Stomp Dance. The balance of the erotic and sovereignty produces queer Indigenous futures by allowing traditions tainted by colonial contact to come undone while remembering how our sovereign tribal traditions, histories, and stories sustain us.

HANN SCURLOCK (they/them) is a Two-Spirit citizen of the Chickasaw Nation (Keel, James, and Pickens descendent), a PhD candidate in the University of British Columbia’s English Language and Literatures department, and an avid bead worker. They research queer Indigenous studies, Native American water literatures, and “otherwise” ecocriticism.

NOTES

1. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Border of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014), 105; Jodi A. Byrd, “Indigenous Futures beyond

the Sovereignty Debate,” in *The Cambridge History of Native American Literature*, ed. Melanie Benson Taylor (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 501–18.

2. I myself am not Mvskoke. I am a Two-Spirit citizen of the Chickasaw Nation. For those who are unfamiliar, the Mvskoke and the Chickasaw come from similar traditions and geographical landscapes. Both of our tribal nations are a part of the “Five Civilized Tribes” and our languages are a part of the Muskogean language family. I am personally invested in this argument while also separate from *Drowning in Fire’s* Mvskoke context.

3. Robbie Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: The European Invasion and the Transformation of the Mississippian World, 1540–1715* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 12.

4. The Mississippian World includes very diverse Nations, ranging geologically from Florida to Oklahoma to Ohio to New York. However, for the purposes of this article, I primarily focus on Eastern Woodlands Mississippian cosmology, which is where the Chickasaw Nation is located (my tribal affiliation) and Womack’s Mvskoke context.

5. Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 2–3

6. Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 3.

7. Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 19.

8. Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 22.

9. Daniel Heath Justice, “A THEORY OF ANOMALY,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, nos. 1–2 (2010): 218.

10. I do not go into detail in this essay about the intricacies of the term sovereignty. However, the inner workings of Indigenous sovereignty, which is critically different than Western conceptions of sovereignty is necessary in understanding the depths of this argument. Indigenous sovereignty is “generated from consensus and a respect for dissent” (Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “The Place Where We All Live and Work Together A Gendered Analysis of ‘Sovereignty,’” in *Native Studies Keywords*, ed. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja [University of Arizona Press, 2015], 19). Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. speaks to this risk, stating, “The definition of sovereignty covers a multitude of sins, having lost its political moorings, and now is adrift on the currents of individual fancy” (Vine Deloria Jr., “Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Looking at the Windmills in Our Minds,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 13, no. 1 [1998]: 26–27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1409027>). My desire to strip “sovereignty” from the erotic is to avoid the risks associated with losing the term’s importance and also to assert that there are other ways that we may conceptualize Indigenous erotics, other than through this innocuous term. This essay is a response to Chickasaw Nation scholar, Amanda Cobb’s call to “decolonize our definition of sovereignty” (Amanda J. Cobb, “Understanding Tribal Sovereignty: Definitions, Conceptualizations, and Interpretations,” *American Studies* 46, no. 3 [2005]: 131, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40643893>).

11. I recognize that the terms “queer Indigenous,” “Two-Spirit,” and “Indigiqueer” are limiting, as they do not speak to the specificity of tribal traditions. Many tribal

communities have their own distinct terminology in traditional languages to describe queer Indigenous peoples.

12. Qwo-Li Driskill, "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirit/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic," *Studies in American Indian Literature* 16, no. 2 (2004): 51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20739500>.

13. Beth Brant, "Recovery and Transformation," *A Generous Spirit: Selected Works by Beth Brant*, edited by Janice Gould (Sinister Wisdom, 2019). Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 2007), 54.

14. Billy-Ray Belcourt, "To Be Unbodied," *Canadian Art* (2019), <https://canadianart.ca/features/to-be-unbodied/>; Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, "Living with Negativity," *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Duke University Press, 2014), 63–117; Driskill, "Stolen from Our Bodies," 52.

15. Jodi A. Byrd and Joseph M. Pierce, "Settler-Colonial Elimination and the Dobbs Decision: Relationality, Indigenous Kin-Making, and Queer Responsibilities," *GLQ* 30, no. 1 (2024): 82. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/919540>.

16. Billy-Ray Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body* (Penguin Canada, 2020), 130.

17. Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt, "'On the Risk of a New Relationality': An Interview with Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt," by Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 2, no. 3 (2012).

18. Belcourt, "To Be Unbodied."

19. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xx-vii; Leanne Howe, "The Chaos of Angels," *Callaloo* 17, no. 1 (1994): 108–14.

20. Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body*, 113.

21. John Gamber, "Born Out of the Creek Landscape: Reconstructing Community and Continuance in Craig Womack's *Drowning in Fire*," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 34, no. 2 (2009): 106.

22. Craig Womack, *Drowning in Fire* (University of Arizona Press, 2001), 4.

23. James H. Hill and Mary Haas, *Creek (Muskogee) Texts* (University of California Press, 2015), 369–70.

24. Hill and Haas, *Creek (Muskogee) Texts*, 369–71.

25. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 5.

26. Hill and Haas, *Creek (Muskogee) Texts*, 369–71.

27. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 100.

28. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 101.

29. Even though the erotic shared between Josh and Jimmy is not necessarily "sovereign," it is still natural and normal in Mvskoke culture.

30. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 101.

31. Belcourt, "To Be Unbodied."

32. Gamber, "Born Out of the Creek Landscape," 115.

33. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 105.

34. Audra Simpson, "The Sovereignty of Critique," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 119, no. 4 (2020): 686.

35. Belcourt, "To Be Unbodied."

36. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 110.
37. Hill and Haas, *Creek (Muskogee) Texts*, 366–69.
38. Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, viii–2.
39. F. Kent Reilly and James Garber, *Ancient Objects and Sacred Realms: Interpretations of Mississippian Iconography* (University of Texas Press, 2007), 118.
40. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 5–6.
41. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 34. Creek is another name for Mvskoke or Muscogee.
42. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 34.
43. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 38–39.
44. Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 244.
45. Justice, “NOTES TOWARD A THEORY OF ANOMALY,” 219.
46. Womack, *Red on Red*, 244.
47. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 184.
48. Craig Womack defines suspicioning stating: “Suspicioning takes advantage of doubt to go out on a limb and blurt out or whisper. . . . Suspicioning foregrounds subjectivity and intuition, those things least empirical. A good suspicioner often has her neighbors in mind” (Craig Womack, “Suspicioning: Imagining a Debate between Those Who Get Confused, and Those Who Don’t, When They Read Critical Responses to the Poems of Joy Harjo, or What’s an Old-Timey Gay Boy Like Me to Do?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, nos. 1–2 [2010]: 133).
49. I use this term like Womack and Daniel Heath Justice use it. Justice articulates that even though “tradition” has been used by many tribal communities to exclude queer tribal members from the circle, the term cannot be entirely abandoned, because at its best, tradition is about maintaining responsibilities and kinship relations (“NOTES TOWARD A THEORY OF ANOMALY,” 214). Further, Womack argues for “an alternative definition of traditionalism as anything that is useful to Indian people in retaining their values and worldviews, no matter how much it deviates from what people did one or two hundred years ago” (Womack, *Red on Red*, 42).
50. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 6.
51. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 6.
52. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 100.
53. Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body*, 2.
54. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 100.
55. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 6.
56. Kenneth W. McIntosh, “Harjo, Chitto,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=HA020>.
57. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 247.
58. Mark Rifkin, “Native Nationality and the Contemporary Queer: Tradition, Sexuality, and History in *Drowning in Fire*,” *The American Indian Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2008): 453.
59. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 222.

60. There has been ongoing desecration of the Hickory Ground site near Wetumpka, Alabama, through illegal acts, even though the site was placed on the National Register of Historical Places. The Muscogee (Creek) Nation filed a lawsuit in 2012 at the United States District Court, and on March 15, 2021 (nearly a decade later), the district court dismissed the Nation's claims, even though the site should be protected by federal law under the National Register. The Muscogee (Creek) Nation has asked the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals to overturn the district court's decision. ("Muscogee [Creek] Nation Seeks Justice for Desecration of Sacred Site," *The Muscogee Natin* [2023], <https://www.muscogeenation.com/2023/07/21/muscogee-creek-nation-seeks-justice-for-desecration-of-sacred-site/>).

61. McIntosh, "Harjo, Chitto."

62. Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton University Press, 2022), 14.

63. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 121.

64. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 19.

65. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 22.

66. Gamber, "Born Out of the Creek Landscape," 109. Womack, *Red on Red*, 244.

67. Belcourt, "Indigenous Studies Beside Itself," 184.

68. Rifkin, "Native Nationality and the Contemporary Queer," 448.

69. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 200.

70. Womack, *Drowning in Fire*, 199.

71. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 10th anniversary ed. (NYU Press, 2019), 1.

72. Belcourt, "To Be Unbodied."

73. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

Unquiet Title

Rewriting Indian Country
in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*

ALEX HARMON

Abstract: This essay reads Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* alongside U.S. Code 18, which sets out the federal definition of "Indian Country," in order to claim that the novel presents an alternative imaginary in which all North and South American land is Indigenous land. The novel achieves this reimagining in two primary ways: first, through a rejection of colonial time in favor of a longer *durée* marked as Indigenous time; and, second, through a remapping of colonial space through the figure of the novel's almanac, described as a "500 year map." The author demonstrates that through these crucial reorientations Silko challenges the colonial assumptions federal Indian law and produces a reimagined temporal-spatial arrangement that undermines the law's authority to administer Indian land.

Keywords: Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, Federal Indian law, U.S. Code 18, Indigenous land, colonial time, Indigenous time

The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism. Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be—, indeed, often are—contests for life.

—Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native"

Europeans did not listen to the souls of their dead. That was the root of all trouble for Europeans.

—Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* is sometimes regarded as the author's masterpiece and is considered a cornerstone of contemporary Native American fiction. The 1991 novel, which follows the entwined lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters in North and South America, comprises a sweeping critique of the matrix of capitalism and New World colonialism, and envisions an antidote to those intertwined phenomena that transcends the resources and ideologies of Marxist anti-capitalism. That antidote is imagined as a movement of the oppressed: American Indians, Black Americans, homeless people, and others in solidarity; a movement rooted in a tribal perspective that is nonetheless accessible to all who oppose the structures of (racial) capital. Scholars have particularly noted the prescience of the novel's anti-capitalist imagination, with Eric Cheyfitz stressing its relation to the Zapatista movement's re-reading of capitalism from an Indigenous perspective and Rebecca Tillet claiming that the novel, with its "insistence on the political and social power of interconnected communities," anticipates contemporary movements as various as Occupy Wall Street and Idle No More.¹

In this article I examine the novel's imaginative antidotes to capitalist-driven, uninterrupted colonialism in terms of its philosophical gambit, which hinges upon the novel's prophesy of the end of European colonization in the Americas. In doing so, I hope to add two corollary insights to what Tillet has called the novel's "reinvigorate[ion] of popular political agency."² This essay scrutinizes the novel's use of re-spatialization and re-narrativization as aesthetic and political interventions that support its imagined remediation of European capitalist colonialism and colonialism. In particular, I connect these spatial and narrative gestures to recontextualize the history of the Americas as directly related to the discourse of "Indian Country"—in both legal and social imaginaries—as a space of administrative and juridical exception. The novel achieves these aims largely by reconstituting Native territory in the Americas under the assumption that all territory is stolen Native territory. Its Native characters both claim kinship with the land and demand ownership over it. At the heart of the novel is the titular *Almanac*, which not only chronicles the historical transgressions of European conquest, but also predicts a time when "white people" and their world will cease to exist.

In its imaginative rewriting and remapping of Indian Country the novel both calls attention to the social and political dimensions of legal

territorializations, and offers what Cheryl Suzack has called a “competing authoritative account” to the law’s ontological claims about land, based in Indigenous knowledge claims that challenge the legal narratives of land as a stable form of property and wealth accumulation.³ In so doing the novel lays bare the relation between Western law practices and colonial priorities, while also offering an obliterating imaginary that transcends those confining structures. While Suzack has demonstrated how “aligning literary texts with the cases to which they respond renders the law accountable to social outcomes,” this essay reads Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* slightly differently—as an intervention that rather than holding the law accountable, imagines a social accounting beyond the law and a sociopolitical authority, rooted in mythic time and Indigenous story, that exceeds the authority of Western law.⁴ Such a reading accords with Ted Hamilton’s recent analysis of the novel in which he writes that the novel produces an “alternative normative order” to law that “allows storytelling to usurp the exclusive power of the law.”⁵ By examining the novel as a site that not only responds to but surpasses the narrative authority of the law, and connecting that examination to the a spatial restructuring of Indian Country, this essay reconciles the novel’s legal storytelling with its anti-capitalist critique, and offers additional inroads into a longstanding scholarly conversation about the relationship law and literature, the relative power of both, and the status of each as social discourse and site of authority.

REMAPPING INDIAN COUNTRY

Shari Huhndorf has noted that *Almanac of the Dead* recontextualizes the history of the Americas as Indigenous history and therefore “reveal[s] borders to be recent inventions that bear little relation to hemispheric social interactions and Native connections to the land that stretch back to the precontact period,” and in so doing “represents the particular challenges that Indigenous histories and land claims pose to colonial nation-states.”⁶ In the novel, the assembly and collaboration of those forced into diaspora in relation to the hegemon is predicted by the novel’s titular *Almanac*, a piecemeal document of notes, stories, newspaper clippings, and maps, collected and passed down through generations of Native people, that combines visual (cartographic) history with narrative history in order to chronicle the oppression and genocide of Native

people and places the European conquest in the context of deep Native history. In other words, the *Almanac* (and the novel that shares its title) exemplifies a form of “deep time,” which Wai Chee Dimock and Michael Gilmore have claimed “produces a map that, thanks to its receding horizons, its backward extension into far-flung temporal and spatial coordinates must depart significantly from a map predicated on the short life of the United States. For the force of historical depth is such as to suggest a world that predates the adjective *American*.”⁷

Dimock borrows the concept of deep time from the disciplines of geology and astrophysics, disciplines that concern themselves with much longer stretches of time than those normally afforded by literary or cultural study. Referencing Brandel, Dimock suggests that this “longue durée yields a different archive”—one that draws associations between human cultural productions that puncture the associative structure of the nation state, which is, according to Dimock, primarily an apparatus for segmenting time.⁸ The *Almanac* re-narrates colonialism within the context of a “deeper” Indigenous time that proceeds not teleologically along a homogenous timeline but instead as heterogeneous moments organized by a structure of relation that supersedes national, imperial, and tribal boundaries. Smuggler and arms dealer Calabazas inadvertently explains the ontological claim of the *Almanac* this way:

We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that. We are here thousands of years before the first whites. We are here before maps or quit claims. We know where we belong on this earth. We have always moved freely. North-south. East-west. We pay no attention to what isn't real. Imaginary lines. Imaginary minutes and hours. Written law. We recognize none of that. And we carry a great many things back and forth. We don't see any border. We have been here and this has continued thousands of years.⁹

Rather than emphasizing national or even tribal boundaries, Calabazas figures history as what Dimock calls “a structure of evolving relations” and in doing so also remaps the post-invasion Americas in accordance with that deep time. In other words, the *Almanac*, along with the novel itself, is both a map and a history. By imagining “ancient tribal texts” (itself an intervention into the colonial discourse of precontact illiteracy that so often shores up European apologies for land seizure) in a tradition of resistance, the novel takes Indigenous peoples’ permanence on

the land as undeniable evidence for the claim that they will transcend colonial settlement and society. It foresees European disappearance as inevitable, precisely because of a lack of connection with the land. Space structures and tempers time, forcing the question that organizes Dimock's investigation of deep time: "how permanent is the nation as an associative form?"¹⁰ The novel's vision is that it is quite temporary: America, in the novel, is Indigenous territory to such an extent that the borders of the nation can be ignored, refused, and perhaps most importantly traversed. The novel answers Dimock's question definitively: the nation, its associative demands, and its legal regimes are not permanent at all.

This expanded temporal-spatial regime allows the novel to leverage the language of "Indian Country" in order to expose and move beyond the limits of that term. For that reason, a reading of the novel alongside United States Title 18, which legally designates Indian Country in United States federal law, will usefully elucidate political stakes and contextualize its claims for the disappearance of Europeans. Ultimately, *Almanac* enacts a reversal of the dogma of Manifest Destiny by imaginatively reclaiming Indian land and "disappearing" Europeans both literally (even violently) and discursively. The movement that the novel imagines will effect this change is predicated upon a radical redefinition of "Indian Country," a change that appears on two registers. On the one hand, the idea it seeks to revise is not an imprecise or invented one, but a strict legal definition that has substantially structured Native life in the United States since its articulation in statutory law. The novel engages this definition on the plane of action—even revolution. In this way, the proposed remedy for legal dominion of Native space (and Native life) is to violently usurp the authority of the law itself. On the other hand, Indian Country occupies a distinct place in the United States cultural psyche that the novel seeks to destabilize discursively by refusing to code land as property while simultaneously suggesting that any property claims are undermined by the very discursive regime that claims them—that is, Western law.

INDIAN COUNTRY (RE)DEFINED

Despite its association, particularly in narratives of the American West, with a vaguely dangerous place "out there," Indian Country is clearly

defined and bounded in the legal apparatus of the United States as the collection of tribal lands and communities set out under Title 18 of the United States Criminal Code. The definition, contained in a single paragraph, was written to clarify jurisdictional issues regarding the application of criminal law in instances of overlapping sovereignty on Native-held land, and has had vast repercussions for Native people, from legal restrictions to federal benefits. Because federal Indian law for the most part applies to tribes rather than individuals (contemporary Native people derive individual rights through their status as US citizens), the definition of Indian Country provides the framework from which federal Indian law hangs. In that capacity, it designates the land that is reserved for tribal use and distinguishes it from “non-Indian” land. The statute reads as follows:

Except as otherwise provided in sections 1154 and 1156 of this title, the term “Indian country”, as used in this chapter, means (a) all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and, including rights-of-way running through the reservation, (b) all dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States whether within the original or subsequently acquired territory thereof, and whether within or without the limits of a state, and (c) all Indian allotments, the Indian titles to which have not been extinguished, including rights-of-way running through the same.¹¹

The prosaic nature of the text obscures a remarkable history of violence so immense that it is impossible even to outline it here, except in the barest terms: broken treaties, Indian Removal, General Allotment, Termination, and forced assimilation. With that in mind, it is useful to note how limited the definition of Indian Country is, and how limiting its definitional boundaries are for tribes. First, the law reiterates and emphasizes the trust relationship between the US federal government and tribes,¹² and encodes that relationship through land ownership: that is, the federal government is the owner of all “Indian” land” held in trust for tribes.¹³ Subsection (a) specifies that all land held in trust by the federal government for tribes, as well as all land owned outright by tribes or tribal members (including rights of way through the land) are considered “Indian Country.” Subsection (b) clarifies that even Indian com-

munities residing within states meet these criteria, again emphasizing the “special relationship” between tribes and the federal government. The EPA’s factsheet about Indian Country explains that the “dependent Indian communities” mentioned in the code are “a category of Indian country that are not Indian reservations or individual Indian allotments and that satisfy two basic criteria. First, they must have been set aside by the US government for the use of Indians as Indian land. Second, they must be under federal superintendence—that is, the federal government must exercise a degree of control or oversight of these lands for Indian purposes.”¹⁴ Again, though this expands the definition of Indian Country somewhat significantly for the purpose of comprehensiveness, what is crucial to note is the requirement for federal superintendence or ownership.

Finally, subsection (c) includes all Indian allotments that are either held in trust or otherwise subject to alienation restrictions by the federal government. This section refers to the General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act, which gave President Grover Cleveland authorization to survey and break up reservation land, parceling it out to individual Native families in an attempt to end the reservation system altogether. Thus the current definition of Indian Country encompasses residual policies from the much-maligned period of tribal-federal relations now known as the “Allotment Era,” during which the federal government sought to eradicate communally held Indian land altogether in an attempt to assimilate Native people to “American” life. What is more, Indian allotments that are owned by the federal government and held in trust, whether on or off the reservation, have a status of inalienability: the Indian “owner” may not sell or transfer the land to a buyer. This too emphasizes the trust relationship mentioned above, under which tribes or individuals may not sell “Indian land” to any buyer but the federal government itself. It also suggests how deeply tribal and individual Native autonomy is delimited by a legal system that has placed Native people in the position of perpetual minors before the law; Indian Country is still, in myriad ways, federal country, a fact in light of which the name seems like both a cruel joke and a synecdoche for the history of antimony between tribal governments, the federal government, and individual settlers and Native people.¹⁵ The statute encodes these relationships and represents them spatially, proposing that they are stable referents in time and space and enabling Indian Country to be both

mapped and administered. In other words, the legal definition of Indian Country produces what James C. Scott has called “legibility”—a coercive structure that “arrange[s] the population that simplifie[s] classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion.”¹⁶ Crucially, Scott understands legibility as a visual structure, one that produces a map that renders the complex realities of the life of a population or people readable to the state in terms of policing and administration. Analogously, the text that defines Indian Country produces a spatial rendering that is visible and therefore governable.

To insist on this bounded definition of Indian Country, however, is not to deny its place in the American imaginary. Indian Country has also been, historically and discursively, a place of violence. As noted above, its territory provides a spatial representation of legal depredations on Indian communities, from the creation of the reservation system to its attempted termination. Meanwhile, the phrase is so powerful in the non-Native American psyche that, as Ann McClintock has pointed out, it “has been used by the United States to characterize as yet unsubjected territories in active war zones around the world.”¹⁷ McClintock calls this a “symbolic wounding,” and recognizes that wound as a critical component of the United States’ program of “imperial ghosting.”¹⁸ Thus Indian Country is the fraught physical and psychic space in which the legal mechanisms that facilitated “the slow genocide of American Indians” intertwine with the discursive ground upon which such mechanisms became operative.¹⁹ Indian Country, in other words, is one instrument through which Euroamericans have been taught to see like a state, in Scott’s terminology

One way the acculturation of “Indian Country” has occurred is through the preservation of a notion of the frontier that extends through time long beyond the historical timeframe in which it existed. Mark Rifkin has written that the frontier comprises a “moveable space of exception.”²⁰ Rifkin argues that the frontier is not a juridical concept, but rather what he calls a “structure of feeling,” and as such denotes a space that constitutes a form of what Giorgio Agamben calls “sovereign violence,” the implementation of which “opens a zone of indistinction . . . between violence and law.”²¹ I would argue that the Indian Country serves to preserve pockets of that exceptional state, fix them in place, and make them legally legible and therefore manageable. In other words, “Indian Country” seizes on the structure of feeling engendered

by the United States' frontier mythology and translates it back into a juridical concept. This argument acknowledges the entanglements of United States law and the settler colonial imagination, in which Indian Country is both a physical space bounded by certain (exceptional) federal rules and relationships, and an imaginative space beyond civilization's pale—the latter playing out in our metaphorical use of the phrase for combat zones abroad. In cultural imaginings, Indian Country is always “beyond the frontier” and comprises a wild space that remains beyond the countenance of the state. Yet the legal implementation of the phrase serves precisely to translate those beyond-the-pale spaces back into the Western legal paradigm, thus domesticating them and making them legible within the Western narrative of conquest and colonization. Underpinning Rifkin's argument is Carl Schmitt's well-known definition of sovereignty: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”²² So, like Rifkin's frontier, Indian Country serves to shore up US sovereignty while simultaneously undermining the sovereignty of Native “domestic dependent nations.”²³ By fixing Indian Country in the US legal apparatus as a space over which US law is preeminent but works differently than elsewhere, and in the US cultural imagination as an “other” within our borders, “Indian Country” continues to enliven the frontier discourse that obscures US colonial violence and preserves it under the color of law. Into this overdetermined space *Almanac of the Dead* makes a critical intervention, pivoting from a demarcation of Indian Country that is bounded by legal and cultural violence against Native people and toward a spatially revised Indian Country that comprehends all “Indian land” as defined by Native people themselves, while at the same time visiting the violence of forced “disappearance” on the very non-Native communities responsible for Native genocide.

By recruiting notions of deep time to puncture the national imaginary and legal logic of Indian Country, *Almanac of the Dead* challenges the stability of the property regime that underpins the allocation of land on the North American continent. Silko has called the novel her “763-page indictment for five hundred years of theft, murder, pillage, and rape.”²⁴ If I were permitted to add a word to that sentence, I would call the novel a 763-page indictment for five hundred years of *legal* theft, murder, pillage, and rape. Zeta, one of two twin sisters charged with keeping and translating the titular *Almanac of the Dead*, articulates the simple premise that underpins Silko's novel: “There was not,

and there never had been, a legal government by Europeans anywhere in the Americas. Not by any definition, not even by the Europeans' own definitions and laws. Because no legal government could be established on stolen land. Because stolen land never had clear title."²⁵

It is on this premise that Silko suggests that all of what is now known as North America is, in fact, Indian Country, a term that the novel redefines to act as a critique of Western property and the laws that encode and maintain it. This meditation is crucial to the book's critique of Indian Country, and to the way that the novel ties that critique to a larger indictment of ongoing colonialism and its capitalist foundations. This principle on which the novel is built means that in the world of the novel no Western institution—social, financial, or legal—can exist without corruption. Equally, the primacy of Indian land marks the novel's departure from more traditional Marxist critiques of those same Western institutions. Sheila Giffen has noted that “the temporality of Marxist critique divides history according to the rupture of capitalism and suggests the ‘pre-capitalist past’ is developmentally prior.”²⁶ The novel disrupts this temporal imaginary, “represent[ing] a historical narrative of capitalist-colonialist exploitation and enact[ing] alternative imaginaries for thinking temporality . . . in non-linear and non-hegemonic modalities.”²⁷ In this novel, Indian Country is reimagined not as a place that bears the scars of colonialism and marks the ongoing legal machinations of that colonialism and rapacious capitalism, but instead as a site of strength and solidarity that might be “taken back” from a colonial government and its (white) private beneficiaries. The novel enacts its temporal critique by spatializing it, proposing the primacy of the land that endures the transitory temporal regime of capital.

More particularly, *Almanac of the Dead* constitutes a critique of the definition of Indian Country described above in two main ways. First, insofar as the novel enacts a critique of capitalism, it scrutinizes and deconstructs the very philosophy on which the economy that demanded and appropriated Indian lands in what became the United States is based. Second, the novel imagines a re-mapping of Indian Country—what critic Alex Hunt has called the novel's “radical geography”—predicated not on the geopolitical spatial contours of United States colonialism but on the traditions of Native people and communities (embodied in the novel by the Almanac itself) and an anti-capitalism that is informed by

both Marxism and, more importantly, Indigenous philosophies.²⁸ Ultimately, the novel conceives an “army” of marginalized and disenfranchised figures whose destiny, as written in the Almanac, is to take back Indian land and facilitate the “disappearance” of Europeans from the North American continent. Thus the novel envisions a kind of reversal of the standard myth of Manifest Destiny, in which Native people were “destined” to “disappear” in the wake of Euro-American settlement.

The novel, then, rejects and imaginatively undoes what Patrick Wolfe has called “the settler colonial logic of elimination.”²⁹ Wolfe has documented the mechanism through which “a violent rejection of all things Indian, was transformed into a paternalistic mode of governmentality which, though still sanctioned by state violence, came to focus on assimilation rather than rejection.”³⁰ In other words, the policies of Removal, through which Indians were physically removed from settler spaces, and the assimilative policy of Allotment, through which reservations were then broken up into individual parcels saleable to non-Indians, are two sides of the same pernicious coin: the removal of Indian people from the North American landscape and imagination. Thus the novel’s gesture toward an inclusive movement with tribal ideologies at the center is particularly important, as it both indicts and casts off the yoke of colonial incursion in the Americas as a project of disappearance.

RECLAIMING INDIAN COUNTRY

The redefinition and radical expansion of Indian Country as described above enlivens the transformation at the book’s core. By attending to the interpenetration of legal and historical narratives surrounding Indian Country, the novel insists on its re-spatialization of Indian Country as the predicate for retaking Indian land. *Silko’s Almanac of the Dead* ties its critique of Indian land to directly to property ownership and gestures toward property as the basis of the novel’s predatory capitalism. Many scholars have taken up the question of capital and the novel’s explicit anti-capitalism, demonstrating its explicit links to the novel’s critique of colonialism. This section builds on that scholarship to demonstrate the way the novel’s anti-capitalist framework constitutes a form of reclamation, and that the exigency of this reclamation (of Indigenous land, Indigenous time, and Indigenous philosophy) is what produces the

urgency of the novel's move beyond Marxist anti-capitalist frameworks. To begin with an example, the novel describes Tucson, Arizona, this way:

“Legitimate business”? That was the joke of the century in Tucson. Even the new Federal Building sagged dangerously because so much steel and concrete had been “diverted” by subcontractors during construction. Tucson had families of thieves going back three generations; they had been stealing from the U.S. government since the Apache Wars, so what were a few hundred thousand yards of concrete or a few dozen steel beams?³¹

The passage is remarkable in the way it seamlessly ties corrupt business with corrupt government in an ongoing relationship (“even the new Federal Building”), while simultaneously connecting that corruption to the history of government-endorsed settlement projects in the United States (since the Apache Wars, which were fought in part over the territory cut through by American Westward Expansion Trails). In *Almanac*, capitalism—particularly transnational capitalism—is inherently corrupt and exploitative. As the passage above indicates, there is no “legitimate business;” the line between the legal and black markets is irrevocably blurred. What is more, in many cases, those markets are tied to military and paramilitary violence (and, again, the novel emphasizes the historical continuity of this relationship). Real Estate developer Sunny Blue is also an arms dealer; Blood Bank entrepreneur Trigg bleeds homeless people to death to harvest their organs for the black market; Mexican mogul Menardo’s Universal Insurance company maintains a private army of sorts: “for only a few thousand dollars or a few million pesos . . . a businessman . . . could be protected against uprisings, riots, unrest, and even mutiny by government forces.”³² This vision of extreme privatization and deep corruption presents nightmarish possibilities for the novel’s many marginalized characters; however, these powerful people and institutions are in fact exposed as fragile and vulnerable precisely because of their unsustainable use of resources and people. In contrast, Indigenous peoples and philosophies are enduring and, in the world of the novel, present powerful possibilities for anti-capitalist action.

In a chapter entitled “Vampire Capitalists” is a vignette that exemplifies the novel’s critique of capitalism and its ties to violence. The section introduces a new character, Angelita La Escapía, whose vigorous under-

standing of communism is informed by her political and ethnic status as an Indigenous person. La Escapía is a colonel in Chiapas' "Army of Justice and Redistribution"; however, her aims significantly differ from those of her comrades. The robust critiques of both capitalism and communism, which her musings represent in the novel, constitute its philosophical heart and are therefore worth dwelling on at some length. For La Escapía, reading Marx for the first time had been "the first time a white man ever made sense."³³ Marx agreed with the "old-time people" that the violence of colonization and capital accumulation should not be forgotten, and La Escapía characterizes him as a storyteller in the tradition of Indigenous elders.³⁴ Marx, she thinks, "had understood that the stories or 'histories' are sacred; that within 'history' reside relentless forces, powerful spirits, vengeful, relentlessly seeking justice."³⁵

Ultimately, though, La Escapía recognizes that her interpretation of Marx differs from communism, even Marxism, writ large, and reflects that Marxism is flawed both because "Marx . . . and his associates . . . were Europeans to start with," and because "anything, certainly any philosophy, would have been too feeble to curb the greed and sadism of centuries."³⁶ These weaknesses, for La Escapía, are what led to the depredations of Stalin and Mao; for her, the only corrective for communism's flawed critique of capitalism is the same corrective for capitalism itself: a deep understanding and grounding in Indigenous philosophy. In fact, those philosophies, in *Almanac*, preempt Marxism by embedding ideas of communalism into traditional narratives, supplanting dialectic with narrative.³⁷ By grounding in Indigenous epistemology in this way, the novel divorces Marxism's redistribution narrative from the language of property and forces it into the realm of kinship. This shift produces a language with which to critique capitalism that is not simultaneously embroiled with it.

For example, mentioning the importance of history in Marx's writings, she follows that rumination with the following: "The old people had stories that said much the same, that it was only a matter of time and things European would gradually fade from the American continents. History would catch up with the white man whether the Indians did anything or not. History was the sacred text. The most complete history was the most powerful force."³⁸ History is a "sacred text" because of the way the old peoples' stories inform the present, and for the contextualization it provides. La Escapía's understanding of it as such provides the

foundation for the novel's re-narrativization of the hemispheric history of North, Central, and South Americas. That is, the novel understands that history as Native history; in that understanding lies an implicit critique of a colonialist understanding of the history of the Americas as the history of the success of capitalism. For social activism to be effective, the history of the Americas must be "completed." La Escapía's "army" is founded on this principal.

La Escapía's narrative, Indigenous understanding of anti-capitalist resistance is complemented and enriched in the novel through the narration of another "Army of Justice"—an "army" of the homeless led by a Black Vietnam veteran identified only as Clinton.³⁹ Clinton's army, like La Escapía's, is interested in redistribution; unlike La Escapía though, Clinton presents his vision dialectically rather than narratively. On his amateur radio show, Clinton regularly broadcasts his views on slavery, which rehearse and rework Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic and emphasize the lord's ultimate reliance on the bondsman. He presents a thirteen-point Marxist-Freudian interpretation of Hegel, several points of which are reproduced here:

4. The slave is the polestar of the Master's life. The slave will always receive the Master. The slave becomes part of the Master, and perfection becomes possible.
5. The slave has no identity but through the Master; slave identity is not a fully human identity.
6. Slaves may serve as laborers, but slaves exist primarily to satisfy sexual and ego needs of the Master.
12. The slave is offered to Death in place of the Master; thus the slave "becomes" the Master if only for an instant as the slave dies.
13. The slave accumulates power in the realm of the Master's dreams. Gradually, the slave inhabits the Master's idle thoughts during his waking hours. The Master's obsession enslaves him.⁴⁰

In Clinton's philosophy, the dialectical opposition between slave and master is resolved when the two become indistinguishable from the other: the lord's obsession making him a slave and the bondman's sacrifice transforming him into the master. Embedded in his understanding

of the lord-bondsman is Hegel's formulation of the relationship between recognition and the development of self-consciousness. Interestingly, although Clinton participates in an interpretive history that has re-read Hegel alongside the problems of colonialism, Clinton's interpretation of Hegel differs widely from Frantz Fanon's, who wrote in *Black Skin/White Masks*, "I hope I have shown that here the master differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work."⁴¹ For Clinton, as well as Hegel, reciprocity is codified in the relationship between lord and bondsman. But Clinton's Marxist interpretation also suggests a level of mobility for the bondsman that the lord does not possess; while the lord is enslaved by his own "obsession" with maintaining his status and power, the bondsman achieves freedom when his self-consciousness is transferred from the lord to death itself. In Clinton's hands, the lord-bondsman dialectic and the death struggle it entails serves a liberatory philosophy for people(s) marginalized by the structures of capital.

Together and without knowing one another, La Escapía and Clinton form a sort kind of diasporic vanguard that inaugurates the anti-capitalist revolution suggests. Alex Trimble has called this the novel's "dark vision of decolonial revolution that also reflects a belief in democracy beyond liberalism" and "reject[s] the model of third world nationalism" as well as US multiculturalism."⁴² This outcome is produced narratively, as The Army of Justice and Redistribution marches north toward Arizona, where the army of the homeless has conceived a plan to take over US military bases. Through the image of two armies converging on Tuscon from North and South America the novel insists on transnational and transphilosophical alliances between tribal people and anti-capitalist ideas. Clinton's Marxist critique *must* be completed and complemented by Indigenous philosophy to be an effective tool to take back land, and the land that is taken back must be Indian land. In this marriage, the novel envisions a corrective for the two "original sins" of US capitalism: the theft of life concomitant to chattel slavery, and the theft of land associated with the dispossession of Native peoples. The alliance's goal—as prophesied by the Almanac of the Dead—is to take back Indian land, presenting a vision of justice for Native people through solidarity with other marginalized peoples, who visibly occupy the very spaces they hope to regain. The Almanac of the Dead provides

a sort of counter-map for the movement, predicting a world in which Euro-American spaces will be overwritten and re-understood as Native territory. In so doing, the novel obviates the need for a legally bounded “Indian Country” by predicting a future in which the category will cease to exist; or perhaps more accurately, will be all that exists.

This is why the map at the beginning of the novel, presumably lifted from the Almanac itself, is called a “Five Hundred Year Map”: it names and marks places of colonial violence while re-interpreting that violence within an even longer history to suggest a re-narratizing of history, and a concomitant re-spatialization of territory, that reflects Indigenous rather than European priorities. This also explains, at least in part, why the novel shares a title with the Almanac it describes. The novel, too, seeks to provide a counternarrative to European-American history in which Native stories are not only powerfully predictive but facilitate a movement that will physically take back stolen Native land. This is perhaps the novel’s most radical suggestion: Silko imagines Native stories as a way not only to provide an abstract counternarrative to Euro-American history, but as a way to bind anticolonial tactics into consequential group action, action that blocks the teleologies of Western capitalism and colonialism.

Importantly, all this occurs in the novel through a “boots on the ground” approach that requires marginalized people to mass together in order to become both visible and legible as a legitimate obstacle to state-sanctioned land theft. Spatially and narratively, the novel’s conflicts unfold in accordance with Michel DeCerteau’s distinction between tactics and strategies. DeCerteau delineates a discrepancy between the way spaces are created and controlled by institutional power, and the ways those spaces are *used* by the actors who move through them, with the latter being a “tactic” to resist state jurisdiction over the intimacies of individual lives. DeCerteau’s “every day life” “invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others.”⁴³ Silko’s resistant characters literalize this relationship, reclaiming land by transgressing property boundaries. The novel’s spaces are unfailingly produced through the admixture of institutional power (strategies) and those who use institutional power’s very structures to subvert it (tactics). *Almanac*’s chief tacticians are the overtly marginalized, including Angelita La Escapía and her Army of Justice and Redistribution (who join with other mar-

ginalized Indigenous people and groups before marching north) as well as Clinton's Army of the Homeless.

The chief disparity between DeCerteau's vision and Silko's—and it is an important one—is that for DeCerteau successful resistance lies in the ability to defy state power through illegibility (that is, using the physical environment in ways panoptical institutions could not track or predict), while for Silko power comes from forcing the state to recognize Indigenous presence and power. In *Almanac*, the techniques employed by the two contrapuntal “armies” are solidly within the realm of the tactical: they squat in homes and, eventually, on US Army bases. They steal food and raid bank accounts. But because of their sheer numbers (one chapter heading describes them as “swarms of squatters”), they affect permanent change by exploiting the structures of the capitalist market they seek to dismantle:

the boss ordered Universal Insurance Company's security forces to coffee plantations to sweep the surrounding hills of Indian squatters, their shanties, and their gardens. Over and over it happened; the squatters dragged together debris for shacks and scratched out small garden plots. Then armed “security guards” trampled the gardens and burned the shacks. The strategy of the squatters was simple: make a thing unprofitable and watch the white man leave.⁴⁴

It is not coincidental that Silko's tacticians cannot, or will not, remain underground. Their strategy to “watch the white man leave” is simultaneously a technique to reclaim—discursively and physically—Indian land—and also to rewrite the politics of Indian recognition. The novel points up the incommensurability of recognition grounded in Indigenous beliefs and practices and the recognition conferred by an invader government with its settler colonial inheritance.

In tying Native land to the legal and cultural concept of Recognition, Silko suggests an alternate paradigm for understanding Indigeneity in North America, and an alternate path to justice for Native people. Just as there has “never been a legal government” of European Americans in the United States, recognition by such a government cannot define what it means to be Native, or what it means to be “tribal.” In other words, the novel enacts what Glen Coulthard has called “rejecting the colonial

politics of recognition.”⁴⁵ Coulthard criticizes the liberal-pluralist “politics of recognition,” which “seek to ‘reconcile’ Indigenous assertions of nationhood with settler state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity claims in some form of . . . legal and political relationship with the . . . state.”⁴⁶ Though Coulthard writes specifically about the Canadian context, in the United States Recognition is a crucial legal and social construct that defines Indigenous status in the eyes of government institutions, often in coercive ways and often with the implied goal of policing Native identities. Coulthard avers that the matrix of Recognition must be rejected because Native and settler objectives are fundamentally unaligned, and that to do so is to reject the Indigenous–settler colonial relationship itself.

This is the radical reckoning Silko undertakes: to redefine Native land by redefining who gets to decide what “Native” means. And along with the novel’s rejection of recognition comes a rejection of the entire Indigenous–settler colonial relationship, including the concepts of land and property that buttress it. The novel’s first book ends with Angelita La Escapía’s private declaration of revolution, in which she declares that “Change was on the horizon all over the world. The dispossessed people of the earth would rise up and take back lands that had been their birth-right, and these lands would never again be held as private property, but as lands belonging to the people forever to protect.”⁴⁷

It is a third character, “poet lawyer” Wilson Weasel Tail whose poems interpret the climactic action of novel described above, in which it seems inevitable that the prophecies of the Almanac will indeed come to fruition and a full-scale remapping of the United States, reclaimed as Indian Country, is an immediate possibility. As Eric Cheyfitz has written, “Weasel Tail’s anti-colonial poem . . . invokes the colonial history of the US translation of non-alienable Indian communal lands into property; and ongoing Indian resistance to this imperial process of translation.”⁴⁸ Of the first poem, the first half is reproduced below, in which Weasel Tail suggests the inevitability of the radical re-spatialization Indian Country:

Only a bastard government
Occupies stolen land!

Hey, you barbarian invaders!
How much longer?

You think colonialism lasts forever?

Res ipsa loquitur!

Cloud on title

Unmerchantable title

Doubtful Title

Unquiet Title

Unclear title

Adverse title

Adverse possession

Wrongful possession

Unlawful possession!⁴⁹

The poem reproduced here succinctly encompasses the literary and legal stakes that Silko defines in *Almanac*, as well as her entwining of land, law, and Native presence. But first it is important to note that Weasel Tail himself, as a “poet lawyer,” emblemizes the novel’s rearrangement of the colonial story in the United States by rejecting a narrowly constructionist view of the law in favor of one that imbues legal terms of art with poetry and resistant political power. At the same time, his poem enacts the re-spatialization of Indian Country itself through its juxtaposition of notions of “title” and “world.”

Weasel Tail invokes a long list of legal obstacles to clear title, implicating those same “barbarian invaders” in the theft of Indian land using the very language of the mechanism—property law writ large—that was used to seize it. Beginning with the poetic “cloud on title,” which includes any irregularity or bar to clear title, Weasel Tail lists increasingly antagonistic obstacles to title before arriving at “unlawful possession”—an indictment of the US claim to Indian Territory. Each of the terms that comes before it raises a slightly different legal question about the validity of US occupation of Indian land; “unmerchantable title” evoking the trust doctrine and the exclusive right of the US government to buy land in Indian Country, “adverse title” sarcastically suggesting that the US claim to title by conquest falls afoul of property law, since the land was already “owned” by pre-contact tribes.

In the middle of the list is the term “unquiet title.” Reversing what is known as “quiet title” or “quiet claim,” this term suggests restlessness and dissatisfaction, and presages a later poem in which he predicts that “a spirit army is approaching” to reclaim Indian land. The result is the suggestion that the unlawful seizure of Indian Country is directly

responsible for the unrest the novel imagines. That later poem reads as follows:

The spirit army is approaching,
The spirit army is approaching,
The whole world is moving onward,
The whole world is moving onward.

The whole world is coming,
A nation is coming, a nation is coming,
The Eagle has brought the message to the tribe,
The father says so, the father says so.

Over the whole earth they are coming.
The buffalo are coming, the buffalo are coming,
The Crow has brought the message to the tribe,
The father says so, the father says so.

I'yché! ana'nisa'na'—Uhi'yeye'heye!
I'yché! ana'nisa'na'—Uhi'yeye'heye!
I'yehe! ha'dawu'hana'—Eye'ae'yuhe'yu!
Ni'athu'-a-u'a'haka'nith'ii—Ahe'yuhe'yu!

[Translation]

I'yehe! my children—Uhi'yeye'heye!
I'yehe! my children—Uhi'yeye'heye!
I'yeye! we have rendered them
desolate—Eye'ae'yuhe'yu!
I'yehe! we have rendered them
Desolate—Eye'ae'yuhe'yu!
The whites are crazy—Ahe'yuhe'yu!⁵⁰

The poem contextualizes the novel's political action within the realm of traditional Native storytelling with the claims that the Eagle and the Crow brought messages to the tribes, and that the result (much like the results of the historical Ghost Dance) will be a return of the buffalo as well as the return of a “nation” of ancestors. The transition from European context (that is, an incantation of Western property law) to Indigenous frame is completed by the end of the two poems, with an only partially translated intonation that bespeaks a Native victory over the “crazy” whites who have invaded. Such a victory, which would leave whites “desolate,” indicates the remapping that accompanies the novel's

re-narration, and demonstrate their intertwinement—once the narrative of US history is decolonized, the map must certainly look radically different.

The novel's retelling of the story of Indigenous America and its re-visualizing its physical and psychic spaces is a radical critique of the dispossessions effected by and effaced by federal Indian law. As the character Angelita La Escapía realizes, "tribal people would retake the Americas; tribal people would retake ancestral land all over the world. This was what earth's spirits wanted: her indigenous children who loved her and did not harm her."⁵¹ *Almanac* revises then the fundamental ground upon which debates about Native land are launched, and undertakes to redefine our understandings of North American history and literature as inescapably engaged with Native political and epistemological concerns. As such, it also begs question of the sovereignty of Native nations in what is now North America. Silko gestures toward an Indian Country that emphatically is not a space of exception. In refusing this politics of exception, she envisions a Native sovereignty that constitutes a resistant practice. Jolene Rickard has written, "Artfully deployed within Indigenous communities, traditions are a reinvestment in a shared ancient imaginary of self and a distancing strategy from the West."⁵² The borders of the Native nation, then, are not necessarily technologies of exclusion, but the borders of shared experience, something that Silko insists upon with her motley "army" that comes to take back Native land. This framework might finally be able to claim sovereignty itself as an Indigenous tradition. Rickard remarks at the end of her piece that she has "come to view sovereignty as an Indigenous tradition whose work is strategically never done."⁵³ Sovereignty—a product of encounter with the Western world—might be rethought as part of a constellation of ever-evolving Indigenous traditions that ultimately bolster and solidify Indigenous claims simultaneously to traditional stories and practices and also to increasing geopolitical participation. And perhaps more tellingly, Silko's argument for sovereignty evinces a crucial ability to engage and appropriate Western constructs for Native renewal, but not simply by adopting Western practices, and the legal and cultural imaginaries that trail them. Instead, Silko suggests, Indigenous actors have enriched and remade sovereignty in their own image—inventing indigenous tradition and resisting colonial incursions.

Read this way, the novel reveals a complicated call and response with the legal discourses with which it engages. As I noted at the beginning of this essay, in her work on Indigenous women's literature and law, Cheryl Suzack has written that by "aligning literary texts with the cases to which they respond renders the law accountable to social outcomes."⁵⁴ Likewise, in his writing on law and the environmental imagination in Silko, Ted Hamilton emphasizes *Almanac of the Dead's* normative ambitions, offering it as an example of the way that literature "comprises a rival discourse" that "produces material change" by elaborating an "alternative normative order."⁵⁵ In this article, I join these scholars in their assessment of the novel as a worldmaking project that "confronts the nexus of property and conquest to declare an end to exclusive jurisdiction of US law."⁵⁶ As I conclude, I'd like to add only that whether that worldmaking has an interest in the accountability of the law remains, for me, an open question. Or perhaps it is more precise to say that the accounting that the law must face must necessarily include its abolition. As Hamilton recognizes, citing Derrida, literature lacks the enforceability of law, and needs to operate discursively and imaginatively rather than contractually or coercively.⁵⁷ It is no coincidence, then, that Silko relies on the apparatus of prophecy as a counternarrative to the law, as prophecy has the power of divination; as a speech act, it contains a unique relationship of authority to the law, asserting precedence by making knowledge claims about the future that may reinforce or undermine the law's legitimacy. Prophecy, then, offers a form of legibility beyond the ken of the state. By conceiving a prophecy that imposes a temporal-spatial regime in which all land is reverted to Native land, the novel suggests that United States law, as an institution of colonialism, can never rise to meet the conditions needed for liberation. Rather than called to account, it must be undermined. Since the novel and the eponymous *Almanac* share a title, it may not be too far of a stretch to suggest that the novel envisions for literature itself the quality of prophecy, proposing it as a discursive site with the power not only to call the law to account but to preempt and destabilize its normative vision. In this way the novel's making is equally and also a form of unmaking, and its new normativity (grounded in reciprocity with land) is predicated on the dissolution of the law's authority, the unwinding of time, and the unmapping of space. Under this new spatial-temporal regime, Indian Country becomes a

redundant category, just as Western colonial law itself becomes superfluous to the novel's prophetic vision.

ALEX HARMON is Assistant Professor of American Studies and English at Montana State University. Her research focuses primarily on the status, force, and representations of the law in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particularly in Native American literature and film and the American Western.

NOTES

1. Eric Cheyfitz, "The (Post)Colonial Predicament of Native American Studies," *Interventions* 4, no. 3 (2002): 405–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801022000013824>. 422. Rebecca Tillett, *Howling for Justice: New Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead* (The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 21.

2. Tillett, *Howling for Justice*, 24.

3. Cheryl Suzack, *Indigenous Women's Writing and the Cultural Study of Law* (University of Toronto Press, 2017), 26.

4. Suzack, *Indigenous Women's Writing*, 4.

5. Ted Hamilton, "The Dream of Property: Law and Environment in William T. Vollmann's *Dying Grass* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *American Literature* 94, no. 4 (2022): 705–31, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-10341748>.

6. Shari M. Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture* (Cornell University Press, 2016), 142.

7. Wai-chee Dimock, and Michael T. Gilmore, *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations* (Columbia University Press, 1994), 759.

8. Wai-chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 5.

9. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead: A Novel* (Penguin Books, 1992), 216.

10. Dimock, *Through Other Continents*, 7.

11. 18 U.S. Code § 1151. The two exceptions mentioned at the beginning of the quoted paragraph deal with "intoxicants dispensed in Indian Country" (§ 1154) and "Intoxicants possessed unlawfully" (§ 1156). For the purposes of those statutes the territory comprising Indian Country is even more restricted (it does not include fee patent lands or right of ways). For every other legal purpose, the short section reproduced here defines what may be considered Indian Country. *Indian Country Defined*, U.S. Code 18 (1948), § 1151.

12. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (30 U.S. 1), which addressed the question of the Cherokee Nation's status as a foreign state, characterized the Cherokee as a "domestic dependent nation," and is generally considered the foundation of the trust relationship between the tribes and the federal government. Chief Justice John Marshall described the responsibility of the federal government to the tribes as that of "a ward to his guardian." The result is the permanent legal minoritization of tribes and ongoing legal struggles for tribal sovereignty.

13. Land held in fee by Indians is not considered Indian country unless it is within the boundaries of a reservation.

14. “Definition of Indian Country,” US Environmental Protection Agency, April 3, 2023. <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-applicator-certification-indian-country/definition-indian-country>.

15. These policies changed over time. From the Indian Land Tenure Foundation website: “Under the policy of allotment, Indian land ownership was not the same as land ownership for other homesteaders. Non-Indian settlers could sell or alienate their land because they had complete fee simple ownership. Under the General Allotment Act, Indian allottees were declared ‘incompetent’ to handle their land affairs and the United States would retain legal title to the land as trustee for the allottee; Indian allottees only had beneficial or usufruct title. In other words, as long as the allotment was held in trust by the federal government, the Indian landholder could use the land but not sell it or lease it without the federal government’s approval. However, the Act stated that 25 years after the allotment was issued, Indian allottees would be given complete, fee simple ownership of the land. At that point, the landowner could sell or lease it to anyone” (“Land Tenure History: History of Allotment,” *Indian Land Tenure Foundation*, Indian Land Tenure Foundation, n.d., <https://iltf.org/land-issues/history/>).

16. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

17. Anne McClintock, “Imperial Ghosting and National Tragedy: Revenants from Hiroshima and Indian Country in the War on Terror,” *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 129, no. 4 (2014): 819–29. <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2014.129.4.819>. 826. See also Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-hating and Empire-building* (University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Eric Cheyfitz, “‘Reservation Iraq’ Will Be Costly to the U.S.,” *Indian Country Today Media Network.com*, Indian Country Today Media Network, April 11, 2003, July 31, 2016; and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *New Indians, Old Wars* (University of Illinois Press, 2007).

18. McClintock, “Imperial Ghosting,” 826.

19. McClintock, “Imperial Ghosting,” 821.

20. Mark Rifkin, “The Frontier as (Movable) Space of Exception,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013): 176–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473x.2013.846393>.

21. Rifkin, “The Frontier as (Movable) Space,” 176–77. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998), 42.

22. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (MIT Press, 1988), 5.

23. John Marshall, and Supreme Court of The United States, *U.S. Reports: Cherokee Nation vs. the State of Georgia*, 30 U.S. 5 Pet. 1.

24. Elizabeth Ammons, *Brave New Words: How Literature Will Save the Planet* (University of Iowa Press, 2010.), 158.

25. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 133.

26. Sheila Giffen, "Narratives of Global Capital and the Spirits of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 40, no. 5 (2019): 608–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2019.1651705>.
27. Giffen, "Narratives of Global Capital," 611.
28. Alex Hunt, "The Radical Geography of Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *Western American Literature* 39, no. 3 (2004): 256–78, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wal.2004.0004>.
29. Patrick Wolfe, "After the Frontier: Separation and Absorption in US Indian Policy," *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 13–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473x.2011.10648800>.
30. Wolfe, "After the Frontier," 13.
31. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 434.
32. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 435.
33. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 311.
34. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 311–12.
35. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 316.
36. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 316.
37. See Arnold Krupat, *All That Remains: Varieties of Indigenous Expression* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009). In particular, Krupat's chapter "Trickster Tales Revisited" distinguishes Native philosophy built on narrative from Western philosophy built on the dialectic.
38. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 316.
39. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 424.
40. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 427–28.
41. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 1986), 220.
42. Alex Trimble Young, "Indigenous Cosmopolitanism and Its Discontents: Decolonization and Democracy in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*," *American Literary History* 35, no. 1 (2023): 232–33, <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajac>.
43. Michel de Certeau and Steven Rendall, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2011), 2.
44. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 474.
45. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Langara College Press, 2017), 3.
46. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 3.
47. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 532.
48. Cheyfitz, "The (Post) Colonial Predicament," 424. I treat the first half of the poem here, alongside a second Weasel Tail poem. For a reading of the entire poem in the context of the historical legal contexts it invokes, see Cheyfitz, "The (Post) Colonial Predicament," 423–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801022000013824>.
49. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 714.
50. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 724.
51. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 712.
52. Jolene Rickard, "Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (2011): 465–86, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1162543>.

53. Rickard, “Visualizing Sovereignty,” 478.
54. Suzack, *Indigenous Women’s Writing*, 8.
55. Hamilton, “The Dream of Property,” 706, 707, 720.
56. Hamilton, “The Dream of Property,” 721.
57. Hamilton, “The Dream of Property,” 726–27.

Aayuu Metiipay Meyaay 'Emat: Bringing Her Voice Back to the Land

The Literary Rematriation of *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*

THERESA LYNN GREGOR

Abstract: As the title suggests, the analysis in this article uses literary forms of rematriation to specifically discuss the significance of *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero as Told to Florence Shipek* (1970) and its translation back into Tiipay 'Aa (southern people's talk). Florence Connelly Shipek's work with Delfina Cuero shapes the discursive and linguistic terrain of translation from a dominant, non-Native cultural lens. In the (auto)biography Shipek raises awareness about significant Native issues about land tenure, citizenship, and treaty rights that impact Cuero's desire to be repatriated from a Kumeyaay village in Baja, California, Mexico to the Campo Indian Reservation in San Diego, California. The intended outcome of a literary rematriation critique is to retranslate and interpret her story in the Tiipay language—"to bring her [Delfina's] voice back to her homeland." Literary rematriation is a practice to return stories to their original, Native language. The essay provides a methodological model of literary rematriation while also expanding and de-engendering the discourse of repatriation.

Keywords: California American Indians, Kumeyaay, ethnography, autobiography, literary rematriation, testimony, land literacy, American Indian literary nationalisms, survivance

Native American storying is an act of gathering many voices to tell a story in many different ways. One voice alone is not enough because we are what we are in relationship to others, and we each have our different way of seeing. Native American writing is also an alignment of voices so the story comes through.

—Diane Glancy, *The Cold and Hunger Dance*

I begin with a quote from Diane Glancy about “gathering many voices” to tell a story because this practice is at the heart of literary rematriation.¹ I deploy the concept of rematriation to an examination of *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero as Told to Florence Shipek*,² following Steve Newcomb’s “PERSPECTIVES: Healing, Restoration, and Rematriation” from the Indigenous Law Institute. In his examination of repatriation efforts, Newcomb writes:

“[R]ematriation [means] to restore a living culture to its rightful place on Mother Earth,” or “to restore a people to a spiritual way of life, in sacred relationship with their ancestral lands, without external interference.” As a concept, rematriation acknowledges that our ancestors lived in spiritual relationship with our lands for thousands of years, and that we have a sacred duty to maintain that relationship for the benefit of our future generations.³

This article extends and combines Newcomb’s definition of rematriation to a holistic analysis of Delfina Cuero’s story through a retranslation of her (auto)biography from English back to her mother-tongue, Tiipay ‘Aa or the Southern Kumeyaay language. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) legislates “that Native American human remains and cultural items are the remnants and products of living people[s] and that descendants have a cultural and spiritual relationship with the deceased.”⁴ NAGPRA defines “cultural patrimony” as an “object having an ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group or culture itself, rather than property owned by an individual Native American.”⁵ Lenora Ledwon cites both NAGPRA and the Berne Convention as “theoretical underpinnings” to support a claim that American Indian autobiographies or life stories should be recognized as “cultural patrimony.”⁶ Ledwon writes, “The most common justification for telling a life story is to help preserve a cultural heritage. . . . The particular Native American’s life story should be viewed as cultural patrimony that he or she holds in trust for the tribe.”⁷ From these definitions, a case can be argued that NAGPRA’s mandate is relevant in other domains where American Indian cultural sovereignty is at stake, including in discursive forms.

Newcomb’s call to move beyond repatriation toward rematriation provides a more culturally responsive and Tribal-centric method to support the active reverse translation, re-inscription, and comparative

analysis of American Indian stories that are written, transcribed, and published in English. Acts of literary repatriation can thus “return” life stories to the mother tongue (or Native language of origin) and preserve cultural patrimony through literary and discursive acts. “Gathering many voices” as an epistemological and pedagogical practice creates a literary critique that serves contemporary Tribal needs for language preservation, cultural revitalization, and the shifting demands of American Indian land tenure and stewardship. As the title of this article suggests, this work also includes an examination about literary and discursive forms of “incomplete repatriation” that are more recognizable as acts of literary repatriation. These literary acts of repatriation, thus, can reveal the multivocal, multifocal, and relational aspects of “Native American storytelling” by, between, and about women.

The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero as Told to Florence Shippek was published by Malki Museum Press (1970), interpreted by Rosalie Robertson Pinto (Campo Band of Kumeyaay), with orthography and translation by Margaret Langdon, and transcribed by Florence Connolly Shippek. In the *Autobiography*, Delfina Cuero (1900–1972) and Florence Connolly Shippek (1918–2003) use Cuero’s life story to document the significant challenges the Kumeyaay face/d with regard to land tenure, American Indian–US citizenship, and treaty rights in San Diego, California, and Baja California, Mexico. Through her ethnographic account of Cuero’s life story, which is one of removals from San Diego, California, to Baja California, Mexico, Shippek hoped to support Cuero’s physical and literal repatriation to the United States. By documenting Cuero’s removals from her Kumeyaay homeland located within the territorial US and tracking the cultural changes Cuero experienced through the retranslation of some of her narrative back into the Kumeyaay language, I deploy literary repatriation to trace the social, political, and cultural inequities that the Kumeyaay experienced well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The challenges that Kumeyaay and their Payómkawichum relatives experience today, are in many ways extensions or outgrowths of the root problems Cuero personally survived. These challenges include dispossession, disenfranchisement, the depletion of critical food and cultural resources; social inequity; racism, gender violence, and indentured servitude; as well as disputes over land use and land tenure, particularly for the Kumeyaay whom the US–Mexico border crossed. In that regard, my work relates to trans-Indigenous strug-

gles at borders, which scholars are reckoning with through Indigenous confrontations with colonial and settler occupation, nation-states, legality, erasure, gender, recognition, identity, cartography, governance, collective self-determination, autonomy, sovereignty, partition, settler and colonial sovereignty, and refusal.⁸

Gloria Anzaldúa's foundational work in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* reminds us that:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.⁹

On the other hand, in *The Sacred: Seeking Life, Seeking Knowledge* by Peggy Beck, Anna Lee Walters, and Nia Francisco, a boundary in the world is defined in terms of its function, its symbolism, and or its spiritual significance. Their definition reflects an understanding and connection of boundaries/borders to the physical world that emanates from origin and emergence stories about First Peoples, which guide and teach about relationships and experiences to the land. This relationship then informs a "sense of place" in the world and the natural rights to a specific territory." The geographical area included everything attached to the earth or associated with that part of the earth. This of course included the sky because the sky could not be separated from an area a tribe knew. Oral tradition often indicates that "the place a tribe occupied was especially created for that Tribe."¹⁰ These two distinct definitions demonstrate indigenous understandings about borders or borderlands as "intimate geographies"—where Cuero's "narrative reconstructs a specifically Kumeyaay landscape, one where international borders vanish. It is her intimate knowledge of the San Diego geography that will ultimately bring her home."¹¹

Following Fitzgerald, my explication of the (auto)biography was inspired by the narrative itself, which was written as a "repatriation project" that set out to validate Cuero's claims to her birthright as an "American" Indian person who was born at Jamacha (near present day El Cajon, San Diego County), but whose records, due to a church fire in 1917, were destroyed. Shippek explained that Cuero cooperated with

her ethnographic research in the hope that her “testimony” could supplant the “normal documentary proof of United States origin.”¹² In the (auto)biography, Cuero’s migrations and removals provide readers with an astonishing account of colonial dispossession that demonstrate Cuero’s use of local Tribal knowledge about land tenure and stewardship to create the epistemological foundation for her survival, the discursive premise for her testimonial, and the literary artifact for repatriation. Despite Shipek’s material efforts to repatriate Cuero and her children from Mexico to their Tribal homelands in the United States, she was not able to fully restore them in her lifetime, therefore, in effect producing an “incomplete repatriation.” A literary rematriation analysis counters and challenges settler repatriation processes vis-à-vis the US–Mexican nation-states, and instead emphasizes the need to restore/y Cuero’s voice in her mother tongue, restore/y her place on mother earth, within Kumeyaay ancestral mother lands, situate the mothering she received from her female relatives, and share how the mothering of her children and plant relatives were acts of survivance.¹³ Gerald Vizenor explains:

Native survivance . . . [as] an active sense of presence over historical absence, deracination, and oblivion. The nature of survivance is unmistakable in Native stories, natural reason, active traditions, customs, and narrative resistance and is clearly observable in personal attributes such as humor, spirit, cast of mind [*sic*], and moral courage in literature.¹⁴

In the re-translation of the text into Tiipay ‘Aa, survivance underscores the significance and meaning of Cuero’s narration and translation of her life as an active and sovereign agent in the text.

In her effort to track down Native survivors displaced and dispossessed of coastal San Diego lands, Shipek explained that she “followed a lead from Kroeber and Drucker’s ethnologies” that took her, with the assistance of her native informant, Mrs. Rosalie Pinto Robertson (Cuero’s cousin from the Campo Band of Kumeyaay) to Baja California in search of Indians that were as she later writes “pushed into the rocks” by American settlers.¹⁵ Through her relationship with Pinto, Shipek met Delfina Cuero. Shipek’s interviews, transcription, and publication of Delfina Cuero’s life story was groundbreaking at the time of its cultural production because of its implementation of what would become

known as an early form of participatory-community based research.¹⁶ It is precisely in the discursive and linguistic terrain of translation that my research into Shipek's work with Delfina Cuero begins.

In Shipek's interviews, Cuero tells her cousin and friend Rosie Pinto her life experiences about living in and around San Diego County and Northern Baja California, which Pinto then translates from Tiipay/Spanish into English for Shipek. This collaboration illustrates what Stephanie Fitzgerald and Hilary Wyss call "alternate textualities" about the "literacy of the land" that together reconcile the discursive ruptures in the (auto)biography. In fact, these "alternate textualities" are evident because Shipek interviewed several Kumeyaay women to develop the background, history, and ethnobotanical information for book. Whereas Cuero's personal life experiences provide the central conflict and affective narrative in the book. Shipek's fieldnotes document her consultation with and the ethnographic information she used from four Tiipay women to construct Delfina Cuero's (auto)biography. Shipek relied on and included narratives from Rosie Pinto, Isabelle Thing, and Matilda Osuna.¹⁷ The combined voices, life stories, and Tribal/cultural knowledge from these women created what many direct descendants of these women recall as the background knowledge of the "kenaach kwahan" or the "true story" about Shipek's work on the (auto)biography. In talking to various members in the Kumeyaay community about the book and about Delfina Cuero, I was told by several individuals that Delfina's story was not supposed to be only about her. The other Tiipay women that were helping her out also thought that their stories would be included in the book, but they were not given any authorial credit, except for Pinto as the translator.

In light of the ethnographic process used to construct the narrative, a literary rematriation analysis recognizes and acknowledges American Indian women's positionality and collaboration inside and outside the text, reinforces Native epistemologies, and creates a decolonized discourse that validates the survival and continuity of California Indians. Payómkawich writer Gordon Johnson says that "stories are the "connective tissue of rez life."¹⁸ Johnson's words resonate with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonizing praxis to reminds us that "Part of the exercise [of decolonization] is about recovering our own stories of the past. This is inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological

foundations. It is also about reconciling what is really important about the past with what is important about the present, and reprioritizing accordingly.”¹⁹

With the knowledge of the communal construction of the narrative, a literary rematriation reading traces a collective feminine story of survivance and documents the multivocal strategies Tiipay women used to negotiate the social, political, and cultural inequities they experienced. The contemporary issues challenging Natives in San Diego are in many ways extensions or outgrowths of the root problems Cuero and her female relatives personally faced: competition for resources, social inequity, racism, and disputes over land use and land tenure between Native and non-Native communities. Indeed, the narration of Cuero’s hardships as a singular Tiipay woman links the issues relating to womanhood and mothering into a broader and more significant shared context by Cuero and her interlocutors. Her life experiences in the role of mother/wife account for the majority of her narrative: beginning with the loss of her first-born child because the traditional puberty rites were discontinued in her generation, followed by her early widowhood and its consequences for her family; her struggle to care for and provide enough food for her children to eat; working like a man but being abused as a woman. These life events amplify the larger social, cultural, and political problems the women endured, such as violence against women and children, the feminization of poverty for Kumeyaay women, and the pathology/subjugation of Kumeyaay men, and the ongoing need for repatriation/rematriation of ancestral homelands and territory.

Kumeyaay professor, educator, master language teacher, and cultural activist Stan Rodriguez (Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel) tells his students that the Kumeyaay culture is like a broken ‘*aaskay* (olla)—“it is fractured and fragmented, splintered and scattered, but it is still here.”²⁰ The challenge for Kumeyaay today is to put the pieces back together again; to try and make the culture and the community whole. If we take his metaphor and use it as a lens in reading and rematriating *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, then Cuero embodies the ‘*aaskay* falling, hitting the ground, and breaking apart, but still maintains essential components of cultural cohesion based on a narration of survivance. The cracks in Cuero’s life originate in the settler-colonial system of removal that erroneously assumed all Natives in San Diego were from

a northern or mountainous tribal group and would naturally migrate to join the clans on the newly forming reservations. As a coastal Tiipay, Cuero's family was more comfortable migrating from the coast to the desert. In the early days of American rule, her clan attempted to preserve its traditional practices of sustenance by walking great distances across the coastlands and valleys to hunt and gather in Imperial Beach, Torrey Pines, and Mission Valley prior to the influx of American western expansion and settlement. At every turn in her life, Cuero exhibits Vizenor's definition of survivance, and through her cooperation and collaboration with her relatives and with Shipek, her story provides contemporary Kumeyaay with an opportunity to pick up where her work ended in a Tribally centered translation to adapt the lessons learned from Cuero's experiences to twenty-first-century conditions.

Eduardo and Bonnie Duran outline the stages of cultural distress, which they term "acculturation stress," in seven key areas, all of which are exemplified in Cuero's story: contact, competition of resources, warfare, removal, boarding school era, relocation and removal, and termination.²¹ They explain that the psychological trauma from contact and conquest is transmitted intergenerationally as historical trauma that manifests itself in psychological disorders and neurosis in the individual descendant that is not the initial victim of the original trauma but the hereditary recipient. Cuero's narrative, situated and read in this context, becomes a testimonial of a primal scene—of the original cultural wound—the loss of the Kumeyaay traditional family. The acculturation stress lines first appear in Cuero's description of her girlhood—the colonial forces pressurizing and splintering the *Shimull* (relatives and clan), separating people from rituals, ceremonies, stories and songs. She is the '*askaay*—cracked, fragmented and dislocated; and her descendants, some literally by blood, and others via kinship and language affinity—are the pieces that need to come together, to be restored, and rematriated.

In an effort apply a literary rematriation to Shipek's and Cuero's text, I met on two occasions with Dr. Stan Rodriguez and Ana Gloria "Marta" Rodriguez during a Kumeyaay Language IV class between January and May 2014 to read Cuero's story and pick a few passages to retranslate. "Marta" Rodriguez is from San Jose de la Zorra in Baja California, Mexico, located near the village of Neji where Delfina Cuero settled and raised her children. The Tiipay version of the excerpt is presented the

way the Rodríguezes' phonetically wrote them for me without adhering to specific linguistic conventions from the *Barona-Diegueno Dictionary*,²² the Couro and Langdon *Mesa Grande Dictionary of Diegueño*,²³ Amy Miller's *Grammar for the Jamul Tiipaay*; other spellings of Iipay and Tiipay words were cross-referenced and utilized conventions found in the *Tiipay Aa Living Dictionary*.²⁴ Their translation into Tiipay and then back to English nonetheless provides provocative points of departure to analyze Shippek's presentation of Cuero's story.

Below is the first rematriated passage; it is often quoted from the book to demonstrate the lack of cultural understanding regarding international borders, which was clearly an important testimonial for Shippek to reference and argue on behalf of Cuero for her rights to US–American Indian citizenship.

CUERO/SHIPEK: “[W]e went farther and farther from San Diego looking for places where nobody chased us away. My grandparents crossed the line first. In those days, we didn’t know there was a line, only that nobody chased them away from Ha’a (the willows).”²⁵

STAN AND MARTA: *Hay aa, qua’ may mat e’kwaak. Ni’ihli pok puknaches milchish hii kwii akwii mao.*

Stan and Marta’s Translation: We went away from the land/earth, where no white people would be bad.

In Shippek’s translation of Cuero’s narrative, the border and its allusion to an invisible “line” immediately evokes the irony of Cuero’s situation as somehow being what we would consider today an undocumented immigrant despite her Kumeyaay ancestry. The narrative Shippek was crafting with Cuero’s story was clearly in the form of a testimonial that she hoped would provide Cuero and her children legal entrée into the United States.²⁶ The second reference to being “chased away” similarly creates pathos of persecution/oppression and places Cuero and her family in the role of the colonized victim at worse, and as an Indigenous refugee within her own homelands.

In Marta’s and Stan’s rematriated translation and interpretation of the passage, the sentiment is similar although the same legal references to US systems of regulation, evidentiary law, and narratives of victimhood are removed. Marta’s and Stan’s words more vividly explain the removal from the land—and the image of a rupture from her home/place seems

more palpable, devastating, and painful in the simple translation they provide. The Kumeyaay were not victims per se, “they went away” from where the “white people” were “bad.” Marta’s and Stan’s Stranlation reflects the practical, less ideological and abstract allusions that Shipek translated, which is a reaction to a situation that any person might naturally choose to do: remove yourself from the bad people. The Rodriguez translation alludes to more agency and an active choice that Cuero’s grandparents and parents made despite the settler colonial forces and abuses that were being systematically wrought around them; they “went away”—they chose to move, which gives them the dignity of agency, and removes the tendency to over sentimentalize and romanticize colonial realities for Native people.

Cuero’s parents were originally from a village in Mission Valley and were coastal Tiipay that would migrate to the mountains and desert seasonally for hunting, gathering, trading, and ceremonies. Coastal Tiipay adapted and lived under Spanish and Mexican rule for more than 130 years,²⁷ but managed to maintain the continuity of cultural practices, language retention, and land tenure-stewardship practices for hunting, gathering, and trading what Cuero describes as “Indian food,” such as “green vegetables and roots” like *milkasup* (wild sweet pea with red flowers) and *ha’sil* (manzanita berries). They ate “mice, rats, lizards, and snakes,” as well as grasshoppers and bees, which Cuero explains, “were real greasy and tasted sort of like peanuts; they were real good.”²⁸ The *ha’sil* could be sweetened with honey and it tasted like Kool-Aid. Her story reads like a menu of Native foods that one of my students called the “Indian Food Network.” Gathering enough food for the entire family to eat not only for the day but for the weeks and months ahead was a full-time job for Cuero’s family. “The Indians ate everything possible in those days. They were hungry if they didn’t,” she explained.²⁹

Her tribal ecological knowledge provides her sustenance and also defines her role and her relations with her family and her community—and links her to mother earth. Her narrative also describes the roles of men and the roles of women that contemporary audiences are tempted to read through patriarchal lenses; however, in Iipay and Tiipay language there are no gender distinctions in pronouns—he, she, or her or his. The gender of subject is determined by the context. Cuero repeatedly states throughout her narrative that she “worked like a man” and often could not “sit still” to do more expected forms of women’s work

such as making the “tightly coiled baskets” or ollas like her grandmother and mother did. Although gathering/hunting roles differentiated for men and women, she often blurred and transgressed these boundaries out of necessity. The labor to provide enough food for the family and clan to eat was shared along traditional gender relationships in the village. Children were also expected to contribute to the family’s food supply and worked alongside the women. These outings, Cuero reveals, often provided lessons about the food—such as origin stories or place-name stories associated with the particular food they were harvesting/hunting. These stories form the foundation of Kumeyaay humanity.

The majority of the (auto)biography is about food: how and where to get it, what to do when there was not enough of it, and how Cuero and, presumably, the other women narrators, prefer “Indian food” to any modern alternatives. Although Kumeyaay life appeared to be divided by gender roles, with the women and children responsible for harvesting vegetables, plants, and small animals like rabbits, while the men searched for larger prey such as deer. Yet, there is a persistent refrain that “the women had to do their work while the men worked too. Either we do this or we starve. We had to learn how to use all the plants, what to hunt for, and when.”³⁰ Again, this is an assertion that signals cooperation and the application of critical indigenous knowledge systems that were disrupted with the influx of American settlers, and that Kumeyaay epistemologies and ecological knowledges were and are reliable sources of information to sustain Kumeyaay life and livelihood absent gender division, hierarchy, or discord.

CUERO/SHIPEK: “As I roamed the mountains looking for food, I have seen lots of grindingholes in the rocks everywhere. There must have always been Indians all over the country.”³¹

STAN AND MARTA: *Matmer Mathai’wam chiisaw shmay ahmu, ahpii quishlaowar. Matmer Tiipaay quishlaowar mat Tiipaay.*

Stan and Marta Translation: Before the elders went to the mountains to search for food, the grinding stones and the hand stones there were many. Before there were many *Tiipay* all over the earth there were *Tiipay*.

The Shippek quote again situates the presence of *Tiipay* in the land. As it is originally published the statement is weighty and filled with great

meaning. The rematriated version signals a still deeper connotation and connection that is communal, relational, and removes the singular focus from Cuero in the narrative about individual to group survival, to all Tipaay, by once again deferring and referencing the elders, the land, and food as connected. The relationship is evident/preserved in the landscape today by markers from all the “Tiipay all over the earth.”

The narrative is replete with several stories about places and food sources to visit and gather in San Diego County, yet, in the (auto)biography, Cuero repeatedly denies that she is a storyteller:

CUERO/SHIPEK: “Many stories were told us all the time. The stories used to tell how people are and what to expect from other people in the way of behavior. I only remember a few of the stories now, it is so long since I heard them.”³²

STAN AND MARTA: *Matmer kwaame, nyawait kanap. Akun’na onyao quahan wam. Pilquishlaoyaiipit lipit oyao.*

Stan and Marta Translation: Before with the elders we would tell stories. The people knew the truth. The truth/stories left (all those people that told the stories all of them left/passed on). Now those things have been forgotten.

In the rematriated passage and then in the corresponding interpretation the differences are subtle but again poignant. The oral tradition was the vehicle to transmit knowledge, and Kumeyaay ways of knowing.” The stories are vested in the people to share and pass on. Among these is the story about the Olivella shell about the:

babies that fell from the stars . . . they used to say: When the dipper in the sky [Big Dipper] gets too full, it is all dumped out. Then these small shells fall all around near the ocean. There was more to it but I am not a storyteller and I that is all I can remember.³³

The sentiments expressed are contrary to Shippek’s translation. Cuero, in the rematriated reading in the first passage, seems old—sounds old and tired—and her statement that she only “remembers a few [stories] . . . now” makes her seem like the dying or vanishing American Indian—which again fits well into the narrative Shippek is trying to construct for Cuero to appeal to her audience’s sympathies and turn her plight into a cause for justice. While in the second passage, Cuero sounds curt and

reluctant in sharing the Olivella story. Shipek's authorial intentions and motivations are noble, and I appreciate very much her work; however, I also appreciate the opportunity to read the passage in Tiipay, as well as to hear Kumeyaay interpretations of the passage, which reflects Cuero's deference to her elders, the strength of the oral tradition as an active cultural practice.

Stephanie Fitzgerald reads Cuero's reluctance to share stories with Shipek as a sign of resistance to outside influence and/or as a sign of her distrust for outsiders that might be another threat to Kumeyaay culture or community.³⁴ However, I read Cuero literally, and believe that perhaps not all of the stories shared in the text originated from her; instead, the stories may have come from one of her female relatives: from Rosie, Isabelle, or Matilda. In this way, her repeated denouncement is not a demure or humble gesture, but a discursive rupture and expansion from a singular narrative into a multivocal and communal text. When the other women's voices, knowledges, and experiences enter the story.

Despite Kumeyaay efforts to preserve their subsistent way of life and land tenure, the Kumeyaay living in San Diego in the early twentieth century suffered regular and ongoing abuse. Although many attempted to maintain the same pattern of coexistence with the American settlers as they did with the Spanish and Mexican, Mike Connolly Miskwish and Richard Carrico separately document the "involuntary servitude under a forced system of labor, which was slavery in every way but name" that Kumeyaay were subjected to in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.³⁵ Miskwish describes "Many Indians living within Mexican society became demoralized slave labor for the regimes. Others adapted and integrated into Mexican society, making the best of their particular skills and situation," but Cuero remembers it as a series of removals during her childhood: "We just worked at a place and then my father would tell me had to move again."³⁶

Ultimately, Cuero's family removal and dispossession from their homeland provides the impetus for her cooperation with Shipek to transcribe her as-told-to autobiography. The narrative details her birth at Jamacha (near present day-El Cajon) where unfortunately Shipek failed to find any extant records that documented her birth claim. In notes to the transcription of the story, Shipek cites the eyewitness testimony from a "midwife's daughter" who was fourteen years old when Cuero

was born as verification of Cuero's claim to US birth origins. The "mid-wife's daughter" is Isabelle Thing.³⁷ The information in the Florence Shippek Archives are almost verbatim to the language Shippek uses in the "Introduction" to explain Cuero's birth story:

I asked a very old woman from Jamul-Barrett-Dulzura area if she knew Delfina Cuero, the subject of this autobiography. This woman replied that she had been about 10 years old when Delfina was born and that her mother had been a part of the same group as Delfina's parents. When I asked where Delfina was born, instead of telling me, she had me drive to Jamacha, where she pointed to an old grove of trees and said, "In a little Indian house under those old trees."³⁸

Isabelle Thing's response as quoted by Shippek reveals what Duran and Duran explain as the "spatial-temporal" connection of the American Indian worldview. "Most Native American thinking conceptualizes history in a spatial fashion. Temporal thinking means that time is thought of as having a beginning and an end; spatial thinking views events as a function of space or where the event actually took place."³⁹ Throughout the text the interlocutors illustrate Duran and Duran's spatial-temporal links between narrating Cuero's life experiences in and through their connection to her and to the land. The place names the women share with Shippek are literal and literary land markers for community sustenance—and sustainability—if one finds the "weed" that only grows where there is "lots of water" then life sustaining resources will be near at hand.

The Indians had names for every little spot. Many names I have forgotten, but each name meant something about that place. Otay means a kind of weed that grows there, that is, a lot of that weed grows in that place. Jamacha is the name of a wild gourd and a lot of them grown in that place. Jamul was named for a kind of weed that grows where there is lots of water. Point Loma was called *mat kunilly* (black earth) because that is how it looks from the distance.⁴⁰

The Indians had to move around from place to place to hunt and gather enough food, so we knew lots of places to camp.⁴¹

The (auto)biography is thus replete with complex ecological and cultural knowledge vital to Tiipay survival.

Each time Cuero's family/clan was forced to move they packed up all of their belongings "a few *askays* (ollas) and baskets of dried food" if they were "lucky and found enough to dry for winter, a few small stone tools, bow and arrows, *ha'mpu* (throwing stick for rabbit)" and a few articles of clothing they had.⁴² Despite her constant movement and relocation, Cuero provides a detailed account of the way in which the land not only supplied physiological nourishment, but she also discusses at length the way in which the land provided a source for entertainment. She says that she and her "playmates" made mud dolls, stick horses, a rock became a slide that once "ruined her rear end," because she slid down it too much. They would make "clay dolls and animals also."⁴³ Each and every activity in her youth was a competition to prove prowess and strength. The young Delfina was what we might describe as a tomboy today; she liked to "fight" and "wrestle" and would often get in trouble for ruining her dress. Here again, she is blurring normative westernized gender expectations. Other Kumeyaay sports included playing "hockey with *wa' tas* (stick) and a ball and a goal. Our ball was made out of sticks. We shot bows and arrows and threw *ha'mpu* (rabbit sticks) at targets."⁴⁴ All of the activities prepared the youth in one form or fashion for physical and robust life—strengthening them for a life of often hard labor guided by their traditional knowledge of Kumeyaay lifeways.

At around the age of twelve or thirteen, Cuero married Sebastian Osuna, a Tiipay man from Campo. He was well respected in the community and treated Cuero very well during their time together. She explains that she had to get married after her father divorced her mother. Cuero says, "In those days a girl stayed with her parents or grandparents until a man asked for her." Her mother told her that "they needed a man to hunt for [them]" and that Sebastian Osuna had already talked to her grandparents about marrying her. The union was acceptable because Osuna was a *kwaypay* at Ha'a'; he was a captain or specialist. This was unusual and speaks highly of his character for him to be elevated to a leading role in a village in which he was not born. Although he was from Campo, she says, "he was such a good man that people there [at Ha'a'] asked him to be a *kwaypay*." The role of "captain" is like being a "judge" or a mediator in the community. You do not tell "people what to do" but help them "fix" things and provide "help to anybody that need[s] it."

Due to his connections to the village speaker, or *Kucekwar*, at Ha'a, one of the villages in Baja California, the logical choice for Sebastian was to maintain tribal kinship ties and alliances by moving his family to a village where they could "find food and be left alone."⁴⁵ His fateful decision has lasting impacts on Cuero, her children, and many other Kumeyaay descendants to this day.

In the village of Ha'a—located approximately twenty miles south of Tecate, Mexico—Cuero finds a temporary respite from her tumultuous young life until the accidental death of her husband. Sebastian's untimely death from a horseback riding accident is a pivotal and tragic turning point in her life and in the narrative. Although she endured poverty, removal from her homeland, and the scarcity of food as a child, she maintains that she was relatively "happy" up until this point in her life. In her marriage to Sebastian Osuna she repeatedly tells her readers that "he was a good man." He provided for her and her children, they worked well together, and she suggests that the reason behind Sebastian's behaviors is that he was educated in the traditional Kumeyaay ways. Evidence of his traditional Kumeyaay education is the *tunak* or nasal piercing he wore as testament to his completion of the puberty ceremony for boys to enter manhood; the *tunak* represented his understanding of his role as a Kumeyaay man and his responsibility to leave a clean and pure life so that he would find his path to the ancestors in the afterlife. Sebastian's death as the last traditional male leading her family/clan signals the larger community devastation and loss of its *kwapais* and *kuseyaays* (captains and healers).

After her husband's death, Cuero was left to provide for herself and her four young children. Because she observed the traditional mourning rituals expected of her, she burned their house and "everything" because that was the "law" then. Her life would literally never return to the peaceful and cooperative way of existence she describes in her early years of marriage. In fact, it devolves into nightmarish cycles of extreme poverty, exploitation, and abuse. It is almost as if with the burial of this patriarchal figure that the land itself closes to Cuero and her community—and she is faced with the unimaginable choice to "sell her son Aurelio to a Mexican to get food."⁴⁶ He was only twelve years old at the time; and Cuero acquiesces to the offer out of necessity and because she thought she was helping an infertile family adopt a son they never had.

Unfortunately, Cuero and her son fell victim to the “forced labor” and “servitude” described as slavery in all but name.⁴⁷ Aurelio was poorly treated, beaten, and the food Cuero was paid only fed her family for one month. After four years, Aurelio finally ran away and lived a life as a ranch hand working for his room and board; he was never “paid in money” she says. While researching Shipek’s transcriptions and what appears to be the file of the final draft of the biography in the Florence Shipek Archives, Aurelio’s application for citizenship was interspersed with the narrative.⁴⁸ Shipek advocated for his legal US status just as she had for his mother for several years. In the reprinted edition of the biography that includes the ethnobotanical information; his plight never improves as his life ends in his murder in Tecate, ironically over his paycheck—which given his life experiences working hand-to-mouth we can understand why a paycheck would be worth dying for in Aurelio’s world. Her younger son Santos did not fare much better in his adult life; he was misdiagnosed and pathologized as a sexual deviant and schizophrenic due to his lack of understanding about American medical practices and *moirés*. Neither of her sons married, which is emblematic of the breakdown of the traditional Kumeyaay family structure, values, and lifeways after the death of Sebastian, who was not only their father but also their captain/leader. These are the tragic fates of her children’s incomplete repatriations.

Similar to Cuero’s experience, her daughter, Lupe, was married at the young age of eleven; like Cuero she married out of necessity to provide food and security for the entire family. However, Lupe’s first marriage, unlike Cuero’s, was a bad match. Lupe suffered domestic abuse and almost died before Cuero rescued her. Cuero finally had to take Lupe back home, but in doing so they had to give up rights to Lupe’s son, who Cuero reports was taken care of despite her daughter’s mistreatment. Her youngest daughter suffered a similar albeit less volatile fate as Aurelio. Because Cuero could not feed her daughter Eugenia, she gave her to her godmother Matilda Osuna. Although Cuero states that Matilda’s husband was a good man, she later explains that her daughter didn’t get along with them and she took her back as well. This dysfunctional relationship between Cuero, Lupe, and Matilda may explain why there are very few references from Matilda Osuna in Shipek’s interview notes for the (auto)biography.

Throughout Cuero's trying years, it is evident in the (auto)biography that she exhausted all possible resources and recourses of action to sustain herself and her children. In spite of her sheer will to survive and grit, her hunting/gathering skills were not enough to supply food for a family of five. Once familiar gathering and watering grounds were dried up, and with the encroachment and growth of Southern California's border towns, Cuero barely recognized places she once knew very well as a child. Upon one of their excursions to the coast, she tells Shippek that "everything looks so bad now, the hills are cut up" and that she cannot find her way easily anymore due to the new construction and roads along the coastline.⁴⁹ The lack of environmental recognition—her ability to locate herself in the landscape—also seems to mirror her internal state at various times in her life when she felt dissociated, lost, in mourning, abused, and beaten. The relationship and connection with the land and the recognition that it too has been "cut-up" is the final blow to Cuero's consciousness and her narrative ends with the meek hope that she and her children can return to the United States and perhaps attain a better quality of life.

While I admire immensely Shippek's work and appreciate her lifelong commitment to assist the Kumeyaay Tribal nations with water claims, land-use claims, and other violations of their treaty and sovereign rights, Cuero's story compelling as it is, is not told from a Kumeyaay perspective. We are only beginning to see from a glimpse of a comparative reading of Shippek's interpretation of Cuero's story as it was told to Rosie Pinto—amplifies the depths of possible new meanings emanating from contemporary Kumeyaay translations and interpretations. Ongoing narrative and ethnographic analysis will bring more culturally appropriate and nuanced readings of Cuero's story supported by further acts of literary rematriations.

The preliminary literary rematriations of passages and the Tiipay translations from Stan and Marta provide a Tribal supplement to an already important historical and literary work. In a larger and ongoing research project, the goal is to convene Kumeyaay speakers, replay the recordings from Shippek's interviews with Cuero that Robertson interpreted, and record the ensuing dialogue and translation. The layers of analysis in the interpretative act between what the Tipaay women share and don't share with Shippek, will enhance the interpretation of the

text and help situate it as a wholly, Kumeyaay utterance, and narrative. The cultural value and new applications for Kumeyaay language preservation, immersion, and teaching that a literary repatriation project will create are still to be determined. In early conversations about the project held with members from the Kumeyaay Cultural Repatriation Committee and members of the Kumeyaay Community College, ideas were shared about utilizing the repatriated text as a reader in language courses and adapting repatriated passages from the text into performances and cultural reenactments of Cuero's survivance. In addition, the prospect of rewriting other ethnographies as forms of literary repatriation sparks a much wider conversation about the practical use for other individuals interested in repatriating stories, written or remembered, into their Native languages.⁵⁰ The hope is that this work is continued as a cultural source that inspires new uses for Native languages. The application of literary repatriations of American Indian stories will provide First People with a new text, literary tool, and use of Native languages for curriculum development and increase the availability and accessibility of familiar stories published in local Tribal languages.

Finally, the theoretical and critical application of literary repatriation situates and privileges the American Indian reader's/speaker's positionality within and beyond the text, reinforces Native epistemologies, and creates a decolonized discourse that validates the survival and continuity of American Indians. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonizing praxis reminds us that

part of the exercise [of decolonization] is about recovering our own stories of the past. This is inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological foundations. It is also about reconciling and what is really important about the past with what is important about the present, and reprioritizing accordingly.⁵¹

The repatriation of Delfina Cuero's life story, the retranslation of her words, preliminary as they may be, enact decolonizing methods from Smith's "dialogue across the boundaries of oppositions" . . . [and] this [dialogue] has to be because we constantly collide with dominant views while we are attempting to transform our lives on a larger scale than our own localized circumstances."⁵² Cuero and her female relatives along with Shippek indeed worked against many borders of difference and opposition to construct and create meanings from their lives. It is the

interpretation of their collaboration—their discourse and dialogue that we encounter in the (auto)biography and in the literary rematriation that begins to shift and relocate its old meaning in new ways.

THERESA LYNN GREGOR is Kumeyaay from the Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel as well as Yoéme. She is Associate Professor and the Director of the Program in American Indian Studies at CSU Long Beach, aka Puvungna. Dr. Gregor's research focuses on California American Indian women, sovereignty, literary and cultural rematriation, and tribal cultural resiliency and revitalization.

NOTES

I am a descendant of the Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel or Elch'qu'an from the Nejo Sh'mulq on my maternal line. I trace my maternal Iipay ancestry back to my fifth-great-grandmother; my family connections are formed from the relationships and stories about my great-great-grandparents who were born in the transitional period between California statehood and the Treaty of Santa Ysabel (1852). The Treaty of Santa Ysabel formally recognized the nine Iipay villages near Elch'qu'an (The Knolls), which would eventually become the site of the present-day Santa Ysabel Indian Reservation. However, like the other seventeen treaties negotiated with California American Indians at this time, it was never ratified by the US Congress; instead, legislators sequestered and suppressed the Treaties to open California for US settlement. In December 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant issued an Executive Order to reinstate part of the "lost" treaties by establishing Mission Indian Reserves of land in San Diego. In 1903, my great-great-grandparents, Antonio and Andrea (Guacheno) Cuevas, were forcibly removed from their home at Mataguay, White Earth/Clay Village, and pushed onto Vulcan Mountain, Track 3 of the Santa Ysabel Indian Reservation in northern San Diego County.

I use the terms First People, American Indian, Native American, Tribal, Native, and California American Indian throughout the essay interchangeably to express collective identity of First Peoples in the territorial United States. I use the term Kumeyaay, the People Looking over the Cliffs/Facing West, as a collective reference to both Northern (Iipay) and Southern (Tiipay) People in San Diego, California, USA and Baja California, Mexico. When speaking specifically about Northern or Southern People or languages, I use Iipay or Tiipay to make the distinction.

1. Diane Glancy, *The Cold and Hunger Dance* (University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

2. Delfino Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero as Told to Florence Shipek* (Malki, 1970). One of the most well-known and often-cited persons for telling the story of the Kumeyaay is Florence Shipek (1918–2003). Shipek entered college at the young age of fifteen and majored in geology at the University of Washington; she pursued graduate work in Anthropology, History, and Art at the University of Arizona in the late 1930s. She was born in 1918 to industrious parents who very much instilled in her a Puritan work ethic. Both of her parents became dentists and her

father worked as such for the US Navy, which meant that her family moved frequently (perhaps this is an experience she identified with and connected to Delfina Cuero's life story). Shippek situated and wrote about Cuero's life story from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century paradigm of salvage ethnography popularized by Franz Boas and based on the premise that American Indian cultures and peoples were "vanishing." Her work with Southern California Indians, on the contrary, diverged from this perspective and instead created an early iteration of social justice-based work with the Mission Indian Docket 80 (part of the Mission Indian Land Settlement Case).

3. Steven Newcomb, "PERSPECTIVES: Healing, Restoration, and Rematriation," *Indigenous Law Institute News & Notes* (Spring/Summer 1995), 3, <http://ili.nativeweb.org/>.

4. Devon Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?* (University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

5. See "Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation," Chap. 32, Title 25 U.S. Code, sec. 3001, Definitions, [3] [D]: "cultural patrimony." <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=&req=%28title%3A25+section%3A3001+edition%3Aprelim%29&f=&fq=&num=0&hl=false&edition=prelim>.

6. Lenora Ledwon, "Native American Life Stories and 'Authorship': Legal and Ethical Issues," *American Indian Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1997): 579–93.

7. "Native Life Stories," 77.

8. UC Santa Cruz Trans-Indigenous Borderlands Symposium, March 2023.

9. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), 3.

10. Peggy Beck, Anna Lee Walters, and Nia Francisco, *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge and Sources of Life* (Dine Community College Press, 1977), 69.

11. Stephanie Fitzgerald, "Intimate Geographies: Reclaiming Citizenship and Community in *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero* and *Bonita Nuñez's Diaries*," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 30, no. 1 (2006): 114.

12. Florence Connolly Shippek and Delfina Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero* (Ballena Press, 1972), 16.

13. Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

14. Vizenor, *Native Liberty*, 85.

15. Florence Connolly Shippek, *Pushed Into the Rocks* (University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

16. Shippek was known as a local ethnohistorian who collaborated with San Diego Tribes shortly after the passage of Public Law 280 (1953), which transferred federal jurisdiction over tribal lands to state authorities for criminal and civil infractions; soon she was consulted to work on several ancillary projects that included the Mission Indian Land Claims case, water rights and claim cases for Luiseño tribes, and issues of ancestry and descent challenging tribal members entitlement to enrollment, land claims, and other treaty rights. She spent most of her life challenging the ethnohistorical record created by early ethnologists like Alfred Kroeber (1925) and Leslie

Spier (1965); and she very much saw herself as a “revisionist anthropologist.” Her argument challenged their etic view of California Indian people and culture. Shipek spent the majority of her life exposing the fallacies in the early work of these anthropologists. She challenged their failure to incorporate and understand tribal ecological knowledge and land tenure. “After all,” Shipek cautioned in her essay on the “Mission Indians and Indians of California Land Claims” (1989), “they [the California Indians] are the authorities; we [anthropologists] are merely translators from their reality to our ‘science.’ We must be careful not to distort reality in the process of translating” (1974: 418).

17. I was told by tribal community members that Shipek interviewed several Kumeyaay women to develop the background, history, and ethnobotanical information for Cuero’s (auto)biography. Based on this information, I researched Shipek’s fieldnotes and searched for recorded interviews at the Florence C. Shipek Archives at the Sycuan Kumeyaay Cultural Center. I visited the Shipek Archives between 2016 and 2019. Florence C. Shipek Archives and Sycuan Kumeyaay Cultural Center and Museum, 910 Willow Glen Dr, El Cajon, CA 92019. Accessed 12 Sep 2018.

18. *Rez Dogs Eat Beans* (First Book Library Publishers 2001). Johnson is the author of *Birdsongs Don’t Lie* (Heyday Press, 2022) and *Fast Cars and Frybread* (Heyday Press, 2007).

19. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books, 2012), 40.

20. Stan Rodriguez, personal communication, 2012.

21. Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (SUNY Press, 1995).

22. *Barona Inter-Tribal Dictionary: ‘Iipay/Tiipay Aa Uumall* (Barona Cultural Museum Press, 2008).

23. Ted Couro and Margaret Langdon, *Let’s Talk ‘Iipay Aa: An Introduction to the Mesa Grande Diegueño Language* (Malki Museum Press, Ballena Press, 1975).

24. Amy Miller, *Grammar of the Jamul Tiipaay: Language Power, and Social Process* (Mouton de Gruyter, 2001); *‘Iipay Aa Living Dictionary*: <https://livingdictionaries.app/iipay-aa/about>.

25. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 26.

26. In “Intimate Geographies,” Stephanie Fitzgerald makes the argument that “Cuero’s text narrates the history of the migration and eventual disintegration of her small, autonomous band of Kumeyaay Indians from the San Diego area into Baja California” and that “Cuero was not completely unaware of her rights as an individual and as a citizen of the United States. This passage reflects Cuero’s understanding of the complexities of the paper trails involved in US bureaucratic systems, from labor records to baptismal records of the Catholic Church, and their relationship to proving US origin” (112–13).

27. Mike Connolly Miskwish, *Kumeyaay: A History Textbook, Vol. 1, Pre-Contact to 1893* (Sycuan Press, 2007); Richard Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land* (Sunbelt Publications, 2007) documents in great detail and from a Kumeyaay-centered perspective this colonial history and impact on the Kumeyaay.

28. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 32–33.
29. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 28.
30. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 32.
31. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 58.
32. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 41.
33. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 29.
34. Fitzgerald, “Intimate Geographies,” 116.
35. Miskwish, *Kumeyaay*, 1:70; Richard Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land* (Sunbelt Publications, 2007), 84.
36. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 24.
37. Florence C. Shipek, interview notes from Isabelle Thing (Informant). Box 29, Folder 31. Florence C. Shipek Archives and Sycuan Kumeyaay Cultural Center and Museum, 910 Willow Glen Dr, El Cajon, CA 92019. Accessed 12 Sep 2018.
38. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 8–9.
39. Duran and Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*, 14.
40. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 24.
41. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 26.
42. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 26–27.
43. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 34.
44. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 35.
45. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 54.
46. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 60.
47. See Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (Yale University Press, 2017); Miskwish, *Kumeyaay*, vol. 1; and Richard Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land* (Sunbelt Publications, 2007).
48. Florence C. Shipek Archives and Sycuan Kumeyaay Cultural Center and Museum, 910 Willow Glen Dr, El Cajon, CA 92019.
49. Shipek and Cuero, *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero*, 27.
50. These conversations occurred in December 2013.
51. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 40.
52. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 40.

George Copway's Figures of Homesickness

JAKE MCGINNIS

Abstract: This essay reads George Copway's autobiography, *The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh* (1847), in terms of a series of dramatic sociopolitical and environmental changes that shape the text, including the arrival of Protestant religious cultures in the Great Lakes region, the decline of the fur trade, the beginning of an American timber and mineral boom, and, most significantly, the emergence of the Ojibwe Nation as a collective political entity. Faced with these interconnected disturbances to established ways of living and being, Copway turned to literary travel writing as a means of navigating a changing world. Reading this text as a travel narrative, the author concludes, offers an important window into Copway's historical experiences and his use of literary writing as a resource for nineteenth-century life. Copway's sense of homesickness ultimately suggests a tribally specific, place-based response to colonialism and the rupture of his established ways of being and moving about in the world.

Keywords: George Copway, travel literature, autobiography, homesickness, Great Lakes Region

I view my life like the mariner on the wide ocean, without a compass, in the dark night, as he watches the heavens for the north star, which his eye having discovered, he makes his way amidst surging seas, and tossed by angry billows into the very jaws of death, till he arrives safely anchored at port. I have been tossed with hope and fear in this life.

—George Copway

Writing in his autobiography, *The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh* (1847), Mississauga Ojibwe author George Copway looks back at a much-anticipated homecoming.¹ For more than five years he's been traveling, teaching, and preaching among Ojibwe communities

near Lake Superior and in the upper Mississippi River basin—and the whole time he's longed for home. "Never did I feel so rejoiced as when I stood on top of a hill, and saw my village, seven miles across the lake," he writes.² He goes on to describe a complex surge of emotions:

I gazed upon it in pure delight; and as I took a retrospective view of all the scenes which I had passed through, I wondered at myself, and at the great goodness of God. . . . While crossing the lake, I was in perfect ecstasies; my heart leaped with joy; and my thoughts and emotions were at my home long before my person. O how tedious and tardy the boat ride seemed to be; I wished for wings several times. But at last, I planted my foot upon the spot on which I had been reared from infancy, and where some of my sweetest and happiest recollections of my life were centered. But "every sweet has it [*sic*] bitter."³

Copway's prose often draws from the conventions of sentimental Christian life writing, but this moment stands out for its poignancy, lending a particular emphasis to his ecstatic return to this "spot on which I had been reared from infancy." Arriving again in Rice Lake, the reader senses, marks a threshold moment in the travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh, a turning point.

Copway is a somewhat enigmatic figure in the field of North American literature, and despite achieving remarkable literary success in his day, his work remains understudied. Born in Canada in 1818, Copway traveled in the present-day states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, where he served as a teacher, translator, and missionary to peoples living near the communities of Keweenaw Bay, Bad River, Red Cliff, Lac Courte Oreilles, and Fond du Lac, among others. Beginning in 1847, he briefly achieved celebrity status in the United States before descending into debt and obscurity in the 1850s. In this essay, I read *Life, History, and Travels* in terms of Copway's witness to a series of dramatic socio-political and environmental changes taking place in the nineteenth century, including the arrival of Protestant religious cultures in the Great Lakes region, the decline of the fur trade, the beginning of an American timber and mineral boom in Michigan and further west, and, most significantly, the emergence of the Ojibwe Nation as a collective political entity. Faced with these interconnected disturbances to established ways of living and being, Copway turned to literary writing as a means

of navigating a changing world. Cathy Rex has called his autobiography a means of "experimenting with forms of survivance and cultural fluidity."⁴ I agree and take this one step further, interpreting *Life, History, and Travels* specifically as an experimental travel essay marked by arrivals and sentimentally charged homecomings. For Copway, homesickness comes to reflect a sudden and dramatic break between culture and nature, between himself as a Christian Ojibwe and the specific environment that he knew as a child in Rice Lake. Even as he returns there in 1839, he can never quite be "home" again.

This article begins with a brief overview of Copway's historical context, and particularly the notion of an Indian Nation, a concept which he used to describe Ojibwe communities and political councils in the United States and Canada. During Copway's lifetime, the Ojibwe, previously scattered and politically disjointed by the fur trade, emerged as a collective political entity, though not without friction. For example, Copway may have been perceived as something of an outsider among Lake Superior and Upper Mississippi Ojibwe, owing both to his status as a missionary and his background as a Mississauga Ojibwe, from communities in Canada.⁵ Despite a shared language and culture, he clearly was not entirely at home among these communities, and the structure of his book comes to reflect a sense of radical unmooring as he leaves Rice Lake, returns, and then sets off again. The shape of these journeys divides *Life, History, and Travels* into three sections: (1) a history of Copway's life as an unconverted Ojibwe, with significant foreshadowing of future peregrinations; (2) the travels of a Methodist minister in distant lands; and finally (3) a return home, with a new and dramatically different sense of self and world that begins to unfold afterward. Reading this text as a travel narrative, I conclude, offers an important window into Copway's historical experiences and his use of literary writing as a resource for nineteenth-century life. It also records a significant and evolving sense of place in this pivotal moment.⁶ In *Life, History, and Travels*, homesickness ultimately reflects a dramatic disturbance to Ojibwe lifeways and a related ontological reorganization. In the aftermath, the categories of "home" and "away" become radically blurred.

When *Life, History, and Travels* hit literary markets in 1847, it became a success almost overnight. Published under several titles on both sides of the Atlantic, Copway's autobiography went through seven printings

by 1848, and he went on to publish two revised versions, as well as a tribal history of the Ojibwe, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (1850), and *Running Sketches of Men and Places, in England, France, Germany, Belgium, and Scotland* (1851), an account of his 1850 trip to Frankfurt, where he attended the International Peace Conference. He also founded a short-lived weekly newspaper in New York, *Copway's American Indian*, and proposed a plan to US Congress for the establishment of an independent Indian territory, published as *Organization of a New Indian Territory, East of the Missouri River* (1850).⁷ During these few hectic years, Copway traveled for speaking engagements throughout the northeastern United States, and he was familiar with writers such as James Fenimore Cooper, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Washington Irving, as well as ethnographer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and historian Francis Parkman. Riding on the success of *Life, History, and Travels*, Copway found himself, at least for a time, a literary celebrity.

Despite its wide circulation and influence and its significance as an early example of Native life writing, *Life, History, and Travels* remains understudied by literary scholars. As Rex writes, critics have tended to emphasize “the general downward trajectory of Copway’s life,” judging his work primarily in terms of psychological identity. This scholarship focuses on “his constant (and often disreputable) self-reinventions and identity changes, as well as his (perceived) failure to project any identity beyond that of the ‘Noble Christian Savage’—the lowly and inferior Indian struggling through the aid of Christianity to become ‘white.’”⁸ This scholarship ultimately suggests that Copway is stuck between two irreconcilable worlds, forced to play the part of “both systems of belief in his various public guises, one as Kahgegagahbowh, ‘Chief of the Ojibwa Nation,’ and the other as the Reverend George Copway, ‘Missionary to his People.’”⁹ Such an impossible balancing act, one critic writes, “forced him to undergo various personality transformations that finally broke his spirit,” leading to a downward spiral from which he would never ultimately recover, socially, financially, or otherwise.¹⁰ Another scholar has even gone so far as to dismiss Copway’s writing, arguing that he “had begun by the summer of 1851 to lose all touch with reality,” and that while his life as a “literary celebrity in the United States provides rich material suitable for a television documentary drama or stage play,” his work cannot be trusted as a verifiable historical source.¹¹

Copway's character was called into question during his own lifetime, too. In 1846, shortly before he began to write his autobiography, he faced charges of embezzlement and theft. Unable to pay these debts, Copway was sent to prison at Toronto, where he remained for several weeks before the Indian Department dropped charges.¹² These events are, perhaps unsurprisingly, not accounted for in his autobiographical writing, though they loom large in scholarly assessments of his work. Nonetheless, Copway's work deserves continued attention by scholars as a significant literary text. Indeed, by dismissing Copway as neither authentically "Indian" nor fully "civilized"—as tragically stuck between a traditional indigenous past and a modern, multicultural future—much of the current scholarship on Copway undermines any sense of an Ojibwe future that might emerge from *Life, History, and Travels*. To more productively read the text, we must turn specifically to the *travels* of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh. For Copway, travel and travel writing became a means of navigating the impossible situation that was unfolding across Ojibwe homelands.

As Richard Scott Lyons writes, "If anything can be considered an enduring value for Ojibwe people, it has got to be migration."¹³ According to Lyons, the first treaties between the Ojibwe and the United States marked a pivotal moment in the tribe's evolving relationship with colonial powers, other tribal groups, and amongst themselves. Until the eighteenth century, he writes, Mooningwanekaaning, or Madeline Island, had been the center of tribal power. In Ojibwe legend and oral history, ancestors of the Ojibwe traveled to the Great Lakes from the eastern seaboard, along with the Odawa and Potawatomi, who split off along the journey and settled further south and east. Collectively, these three groups remained allied through the Council of Three Fires.¹⁴ The Ojibwe, continuing westward, eventually came to a turtle-shaped island off the southern shore of Lake Superior, where, as foretold in the prophecies, food grows on the water—*manoomin*, or wild rice.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the economic system initiated by the fur trade sent small groups of Ojibwe further south and west than ever before, and alliances changed as power became increasingly contingent upon trade connections and alliances with European nations. Among the dispersed communities of Ojibwe, Lyons writes, "any political ties that may have once existed had long since atrophied."¹⁵ European and American power in the region was shifting, too. At the

conclusion of the French and Indian War in 1762, the entire Ojibwe Territory, once part of New France, came under British rule. At the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783, the region was ceded to the United States, though the British continued to occupy military forts south of the present international border into the early nineteenth century. Only after the establishment of the Michigan Territory in 1805 and then the War of 1812 would the United States take full control of the region and begin entering into negotiations with these dispersed bands of Ojibwe. In 1836 and 1837, when the United States signed its first land treaty with the Ojibwe and established the state of Michigan, treaties “characterized these groups as a single political entity, and since treaties are by definition contracts between nations, it turned them into a ‘nation.’”¹⁶

Maureen Konkle observes that the phrase “Indian nation” entered Anglo-American legal discourse in the eighteenth century, when the United States first attempted to legitimize its claims to territory through legal agreements with tribal groups. This notion of a new political autonomy among the tribes, of Indian “nationhood,” has often been understood as “not really ‘Indian’ because it is a product of colonization and settlement.”¹⁷ As Konkle argues, however, such a position denies indigenous peoples the experience of time and modernity. Lyons is even more resolute on this point. As he puts it, “the modernization that was initiated by treaty signers” is “an unfinished project that can and should be pursued further.”¹⁸ He argues that nineteenth-century treaties and the signatures on them, x-marks, be understood as a means of projecting Ojibwe political autonomy and self-determination into the future. Copway would later become involved with these treaties directly, even as he privately expressed doubts about the faithfulness of the United States, but his autobiography also relies heavily on the conventions of travel writing. By adapting the discourse of travel writing to a sense of Ojibwe migration and mobility, he developed another, complementary means of navigating the dramatic changes facing Native peoples in the nineteenth century.

Throughout *Life, History, and Travels*, Copway emphasizes mobility. Departures, journeys, and homecomings structure the entire narrative, and in each section, the meanings of “home” and “away” shift as Copway’s relationship to Rice Lake, his family, and the wider world evolves. The first section of the book is largely a history of the Ojibwe

people, with some reference to Copway's childhood in Rice Lake before he converted to Methodism. Even here, however, the text places a subtle yet significant emphasis on travel. For instance, Copway describes a dream he experienced as a twelve-year-old boy. While fasting and seeking visions, he writes, "we were to leave the wigwam early in the morning, and travel all day from one place to another, in search of the favor of the gods." During one such fast, Copway is sleeping away from his wigwam with others, presumably people of his own age, when a person approaches from the east, "walking on air." This person addresses him directly and in a striking fashion—"Is this where you are?"—and Copway offers a simple "yes." Then the stranger instructs him to observe a tall pine tree, which Copway notes as "lofty, reaching toward the heavens," with roots "very deep." This strange figure then begins to sing and, as Copway recalls, the tree "commenced waving its top; the earth about its roots was heaved up, and the waters roared and tossed from one side of their bed to the other." When he ceases singing, everything is once again still.¹⁹

The power of this strange figure becomes apparent, but his interest in the young Copway remains unexplained. Moreover, the odd, provocative greeting-by-way-of-question—"Is this where you are?"—remains unsettling. The figure goes on to offer a lesson:

"Now," said he, "sing the words which I have sung." I commenced as follows:—

"It is I who travel in the winds,
It is I who whisper in the breeze,
I shake the trees.
I shake the earth,
I trouble the waters on every land."

While singing, I heard the winds whistle, saw the tree waving its top, the earth heaving, heard the waters roaring, because they were all troubled and agitated. Then said he, "I am from the rising of the sun, I will come and see you again. You will not see me often, but you will hear me speak."²⁰

Immediately after speaking, the figure, who Copway now refers to as "the spirit," turns and departs. The fundamental meaning of this dream seems straightforward enough, and in the lines that immediately follow Copway offers an interpretation in the words of his father, who calls the

strange figure “the god of the winds” and posits that “the aged tree, I hope, may indicate long life; the wind may indicate that you will travel much; the water which you saw, and the winds, will carry your canoe safely through the waves.”²¹

In relaying this dream and offering his sense of what it meant for him even as a child, Copway must navigate the tenuous ground between, on the one hand, his audiences’ intense interest in “authentic” Ojibwe culture and, on the other hand, his new role as an intellectual and a missionary. “But, however, little reliance can be placed in dreams,” Copway writes, “yet may not the Great Spirit take this method, sometimes, to bring about some good result?”²² With this question, Copway’s dream, though it is presented as part of his history of a pre-Christian life, remains available, however quietly, for the reader’s interpretation. Here then, is a seed not of doubt, but of possibility—an inobtrusive instance in which an Ojibwe “omen” remains significant for a Christian missionary. Might not the Great Spirit, or God, sometimes offer information in a dream? Might not a nineteenth-century Ojibwe traveler, making his way west toward Mooningwanekaaning, rely on dreams just as his ancestors? By gesturing toward such questions, even in this indirect way, the narrative of *Life, History, and Travels* establishes a connection between traditional Ojibwe narratives and his current, modern literary form. Moreover, he establishes travel and mobility as a grounding dimension of his identity as a Christian missionary *and* a Mississauga Ojibwe. This dream, though Copway might seem to dismiss it, thus emphasizes the importance of travel even in this first section of the book, wherein “home” is straightforwardly the environment about Rice Lake.

Throughout its second section, *Life, History, and Travels* establishes clear connections among Christianity, mobility, and writing. Copway converted to Methodism in the summer of 1830, a moment marked as much by finding his (Anglophone) literary voice as by a sense of Protestant religious awakening.²³ Up until that summer, he’d “only begun to spell and read,” but with a newfound passion for understanding and sharing Christian scriptures, he resumed his studies “with a new and different relish.”²⁴ This moment is marked, too, by an emphasis on connection to family and to community. By coming into Christianity, Copway is remembering his pious mother, who died only months before, and becoming closer to his father, who himself converted to Methodism in 1827.

In the moments before his conversion, Copway describes being physically ill, writing with emphasis, "I now began to feel as if I should die; *I felt very sick in my heart*. Never had I felt so before; I was deeply distressed, and knew not the cause."²⁵ After fainting for some unknown period of time, he revives and finds his father, who embraces and kisses him. In the moments afterward, the physical space around him appears different, charged with a positive energy: "As I looked at the trees, the hills, and the vallies [*sic*], O how beautiful they appeared! I looked upon them, as it were, with new eyes and new thoughts. Amidst the smiles of creation, the birds sang sweetly, as they flew from tree to tree."²⁶ Earlier in the text, Copway's physical environment is portrayed as a familial home inherited from his ancestors, and Copway himself as "one of Nature's children."²⁷ Here, however, his observations of the nonhuman world take on a different meaning. The environment around him is cast in a new light. Writing in the language of Protestant conversion, but still with a distinctly Ojibwe cultural background, Copway's sense of home becomes suddenly grounded in these pleasant affects.

Many scholars have read Copway's autobiography in terms of Protestant conversion narratives, as well as contemporary writing by his fellow Methodist, William Apress.²⁸ To be sure, the form of Copway's writing in this chapter resembles that of John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (1666) and *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). As Barry O'Connell notes, these narrative forms were deeply ingrained in Protestant communities, often read aloud in households with few other books except a Bible.²⁹ These texts emphasize the emotional response to religious experience. For Copway, though, conversion is somewhat different, marking a dramatic turning point in his life and also a marked veer in the form of the text. Religion in this passage is above all else a means of connecting to family, and also of joining other Ojibwe in a community being actively reorganized in the face of colonization. It is, furthermore, a means of finding his literary voice, not to mention a recognizable form with which to relate and understand the events of his life. Following his conversion, Copway describes a happy period at home in Rice Lake, when he regularly attended his father's class meeting, "and as often as possible I attended school."³⁰ Then, quite suddenly, Copway describes an unexpected opportunity to leave Rice Lake.

In 1834, Copway explains, Reverend John Clark, the Superintendent of the missions on Lake Superior, "requested that two native preachers

and two native teachers” be sent to assist in ongoing work in the heart of the Ojibwe homeland.³¹ Alluding to his success in school and prayers “that God might send me to instruct the children in the truths of religion,” Copway is told to accompany his uncle, John Johnson, along with the preachers John Taunchey and John Caubage, to the south shore of Lake Superior. The choice to go remains in his hands, however—and the dramatic stakes of this decision lend Copway’s prose a teetering, back and forth effect, not to mention a drawn-out sense of discomfort:

One day I determined to leave the village so as to avoid going to Lake Superior; I hunted along the river Trent, hoping that John Taunchey would be gone before my return; I felt very unwilling to go. I was absent over two weeks; they were the longest two weeks I had ever experienced. Yet the whole time I felt dissatisfied; something seemed to whisper to me, “George, go home, and go to Lake Superior with your uncle John Taunchey.” I returned to the village. The first person I saw, informed me that my uncle was waiting for me, and that my father had left it to me to decide whether to go or to stay. Here I was; the missionaries came, and said, “George, your father has left it to you to go or stay. It is your duty to go; John is waiting, and to-day you must conclude.” Our school mistress, Miss Pinney, came and reasoned with me. I recollected, too, that I had prayed that God might prepare me to be useful to my brethren; and now, that I had some good reason to think that my prayers had been heard, and still to refuse to go, would perhaps be acting in opposition to the indications of God. I wept and prayed; but O! that night of struggle! I could not sleep. In the morning, I said to my father, “I have concluded to go; prepare me for my journey.”³²

This passage is the single most dramatic veer in *Life, History, and Travels*, even more significant and pronounced than Copway’s conversion to Christianity. Following this decision, “home” becomes a *remembered* place of connection. His decision to leave marks the sudden conclusion of a youth at Rice Lake and the beginning of Copway’s subsequent identity as a footloose missionary, never remaining in any one place for a significant period of time, but frequently looking back longingly toward home. His departure, in other words, is a radical unmooring, and Copway’s identification with his “brethren” reflects a new sense of place. As

a missionary, he is forced to reimagine how he fits within a much larger world. Certainly, the sense of “duty” invoked here implies a larger benefit to other Native peoples, and perhaps also to white readers, but it also clearly signals what is already an emerging sense of a separation from his former way of living and being in the world, initiated by his conversion and crystalizing here. By succeeding in school, he suggests, he has set himself up to leave Rice Lake. Indeed, Copway's separation from his family is never resolved within the text—for the rest of *Life, History, and Travels*, his father is mentioned only twice, once in a homesick reverie, and again in a list of significant chiefs.³³

I'm interested here in the form of this text, the shape and conventions of Copway's prose before and after his initial departure. Hertha D. Sweet Wong, writing on the importance of *Life, History, and Travels* in establishing a model for later Native authors, notes that the book uses the narrative structure of a Christian conversion to produce something altogether different, “an interweaving of myth, history, and contemporary incidents as well as an intertwining of personal experience with tribal history and culture.”³⁴ To be sure, Copway does draw from various literary conventions in shaping and framing the narrative, but the degree of mobility, indeed the *travels* indicated in the book's title, also suggest the importance of travel writing. The book meanders across genres and traditions, but ultimately it takes the shape of an excursion, with a distinctive turn back toward home. William Bevis describes a certain “homing instinct” as a key feature of Native American novels, in which home emerges “as a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good.”³⁵ In this way, Rice Lake functions as the north star throughout this section of *Life, History, and Travels*, and perhaps even after Copway learns that he can never “return” in quite the same way. Many nineteenth-century travel narratives describe a sense of being “unsettled” by the wider world, having witnessed communities and places in the midst of incredible sociocultural and environmental change. Often, however, these writers solidify their journeys in terms of an adventure or a vacation, thus reorienting that wider, more threatening world to a relatively stable sense of home in New England, New York, London, or elsewhere. *Life, History, and Travels* is unique because it must reorient not simply the journey or the destination, but, more fundamentally, Copway's sense of home and of himself. To ignore the primary func-

tion of travel writing, in short, is to overlook the most significant turning points in *Life, History, and Travels* and the degree to which the text rewrites Copway's sense of place.

After he decides to leave Rice Lake, Copway's expression of his relationship to home immediately changes. Once he asks his father to "prepare me for my journey," the narrative is suddenly and definitively a travelogue, not merely hinting at travel but recounting new and novel experiences as it whirls around a region undergoing rapid cultural, economic, and ecological change in the face of colonization.³⁶ It is difficult for twenty-first-century readers even to keep up, as Copway's place names, anecdotes, and digressions bear witness to the shifting histories of Ojibwe, Dakota, French, British, and American dominance. In thus describing these travels, Copway attempts to place himself within a new and unsettling but also enchanting global geography. The pleasant affects associated with his conversion are immediately changed, too.

From Rice Lake, Copway travels to Sault Sainte Marie, arriving on or about August 24. It is here, some three hundred miles and several weeks after his departure, that homesickness first emerges within the text. Chapter ten opens with the first description of this new affect:

I now began to feel the responsibilities resting upon me. The thought of assuming the station of a teacher of the Indians, with so few capabilities, was enough to discourage more gifted men than myself. Frequently did I enter the woods and pour out my soul to God, in agony and tears. I trembled at what was before me; and said, "who is able for these things?"

This passage concludes with a "still small voice" which answers, "My grace is sufficient for you."³⁷ Copway's homesickness, though, remains unabated. Indeed, it only seems to grow as the narrative progresses.

The next spring, en route from present day L'Anse, Michigan, to La Pointe, Wisconsin, a trading post and settlement on Mooningwanekaaning, Copway describes his exhausted party adrift on Lake Superior, within sight of shore. They have been toiling for days, and Copway, seated in the stern of a bark canoe some thirty feet long, is attempting to steer when his companions' paddles stop. The entire group has fallen asleep, and Copway cannot wake them, cannot even force himself to remain awake. He steers for the shore, wraps himself in a blanket, and collapses. The next morning offers little relief:

Sabbath morning came. I had dreamed that we were just about sitting down to a warm breakfast, when Peter Marksman woke me, and said, "George, come, get up, *blackfast*" (breakfast, he meant, he could speak but little English)[.] If it had not been the Sabbath, I might have been induced to retaliate. It was, indeed, a *blackfast*, dark enough; nothing to eat, and only tea to drink for breakfast, dinner, and supper!³⁸

They have but fifteen miles to go—indeed, they can *see* La Pointe in the distance—but the party will not travel on a Sunday. Instead, they use the time to reflect on their situation, but religious practices seem to offer little comfort here.

Hungry and exhausted on the shores of Lake Superior, Copway turns back to the ritual of *imagining* home, of recreating the Rice Lake that some readers might suspect is always sifting about in Copway's memories, if not always on the surface of the text. Copway writes:

I walked into the woods, and all that I could think of while reading my Bible, was *home*. I looked toward *home*, and wept at the thought of it. I said to myself, O my father, if you knew my situation to-day, you would feel for me, and fly, if possible, to assist me! I feel that your prayers ascend for me; and then descend like gentle rains, into my soul. *Home! home!* however humble, it is still *home*.³⁹

This passage is striking for its use of the language of conversion, including even the "pleasant emotions" that Copway previously associated with connection to his family and a community of Christian Ojibwe around Rice Lake. Moreover, the repetition and emphasis on home place an uncommon weight on these Sabbath reflections, a ritualistic remembering of family connections, of a former life. To continue depicting these low points, to underscore them again and again, would undermine his status as a missionary and intellectual. To portray himself in such a state here, however, within sight of Mooningwanekaaning, and to preface it with an image of all his party collapsed in their canoe, unable to continue, Copway frames his travels in terms of a spiritual journey toward the work that awaits him, the physical suffering of the journey beginning to blend with the other work at the missions.

From here the book continues to emphasize the difficulties of Cop-

way's travels from La Pointe to Ottawa Lake, where he spends the winter laboring in a "day-school" with some "few scholars." Even while at the mission, however, the book emphasizes movement through space, including a long journey on snowshoes back to La Pointe for supplies. When spring comes, Copway travels south with the people of Ottawa Lake, through "the battlegrounds of the Ojebwas and the Sioux."⁴⁰ He then returns to that mission again the next winter, where there are "but few Indians," and yet still "too many for one teacher." His fellow missionaries expected him to travel to La Pointe in the late fall of 1836, but Copway recalls a certain "sense of duty" to "spend the winter and spring in teaching, singing, and praying among the people" at Ottawa Lake.⁴¹ He remains there until the spring of 1837, when he sets off to the south. This section culminates in two years of formal education at the Ebenezer Manual Labor School, followed by a whirlwind tour of the northeastern United States, with visits to New York as well as Boston, among other places. Through all these travels, the reader comes to assume, he occasionally turns his gaze back toward home.

Although he does not mention them explicitly, Copway was certainly aware of two major land treaties affecting Ojibwe in the United States during his first years as a missionary, the Treaty of 1836 and the Treaty of 1837, which together ceded roughly twenty-five million acres to the United States in exchange for cash payments and usufructuary rights to continue hunting, fishing, and gathering within the region. These agreements made dramatic changes to communities where Copway had worked, including Ottawa Lake. In narrating his travels from 1834–39, Copway often describes, sometimes explicitly, the shifting life patterns of Ojibwe communities living under colonial powers. He also alludes to the looming threat of ecological destruction, as when, traveling south to the Chippewa River, he observed a mill where white loggers were cutting pines, the beginning of the Great Cutover, which within a generation would leave the entire region free of old growth forest. Throughout his journeys to the west, Copway thus records a world reeling from a radical new social, political, and ecological instability.

When Copway finally returns to Rice Lake in the late fall of 1839, he is no longer the same youthful Christian Ojibwe who stood on those shores in 1834, preparing to "bid farewell to all we loved so tenderly." In one sense, these travels have changed him, and the community of Rice Lake has changed in his absence. Many of his relatives have "left this,

for a better life," in his words.⁴² Moreover, he comes to see Rice Lake differently. After returning home in 1839 and throughout the third section of the book, Copway makes regular, explicit references to treaties and political organization. Copway will continue to use the discourse of travel writing, wending his way west again and then north to familiar sites along the south shore of Lake Superior. By the spring of 1840, however, these peregrinations are no longer oriented toward Rice Lake and the "life" and "history" of Copway. Rather, *Life, History, and Travels* attempts to mediate the growing tensions between Ojibwe communities, colonial powers, and Protestant missions.

The book's first detailed description of Ojibwe political organization occurs immediately after Copway's return to Rice Lake in 1839. Early in 1840, Copway participated in the General Council of the Nation, a gathering of Ojibwe leaders from communities in Canada. The Council had submitted a petition to the Canadian government, which Copway appends to the text, suggesting relocating the "Credit Reserve" to "a good tract of land" more suitable for agriculture and away from the influence of settlers.⁴³ The reply from Charles Poulett Thomson, the first Governor General of Canada, Copway writes, offered "but little satisfaction": "His Lordship did not even deign to affix his *name* to the note. Since then, nothing has been heard of our papers, and therefore we must conclude that they have been laid *under* the table."⁴⁴ This first, decidedly *bitter* taste of political negotiations marks an important turning point in the text. Afterward, Copway marries Elizabeth Howell, and in the spring he is chosen by the community at Rice Lake "to transact some business for them at Toronto."⁴⁵ From this point through the remainder of the text, Copway's emphasis suddenly shifts from the meaning of his own journeys to, more broadly, the political future of Ojibwe communities.

In 1840 Copway makes his way west to Elk River, in the present-day state of Minnesota, where he spends a winter among an Ojibwe community amidst an ongoing conflict with "their enemies, the Sioux, whom they dreaded."⁴⁶ This region is "a dangerous place for the Ojebwa missionaries," he writes, "but not so for the whites, for they never pretend to interfere with them in any way."⁴⁷ Copway goes on to propose that "Christianity and education alone" can resolve this very old conflict, but his proposed solutions also seem to reflect the growing number of missions in the region. Among his seven proposed conclusions, three suggest various forms of cooperation between Protestant missions of

different denominations, from limiting “interference” to assisting each other and, finally, to not preaching “their own peculiar doctrines, to the disadvantage of other denominations.”⁴⁸ These suggestions, besides foregrounding Copway’s role as an intermediary figure among Ojibwe communities and missionaries, hint at the power and also the limits of missionary work. The sudden mention of other denominations further suggests Copway’s controversial belief that the overall work of missions transcends conflicts between specific faith communities.

In the spring of 1841, Copway travels to Fond du Lac, at the head of Lake Superior, to establish a new mission. Here, the text again considers the relationship between Ojibwe communities and colonial powers. In 1842, still living at Fond du Lac, he travels to La Pointe to observe treaties between the Ojibwe and the United States:

The Council of the Ojebwa nation assembled in this place about the first of October. The government agent, R. Stewart, of Detroit, treated with them for their mineral regions, for which the government gave them a large sum of money. From this time, I shall date the dissipation, misery, and ruin, of this part of our nation.⁴⁹

The final line of this passage leaves little room for interpretation. Copway goes on to elaborate his position on the Treaty of 1842, but his sense of the damage initiated by this treaty needs little explanation. The Treaty of 1842 extended the ceded territory into the Lake Superior watershed in Wisconsin and the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan.⁵⁰ Interestingly, Copway is listed as a claimant in the agreement, to be awarded \$61.67 for his debts as a missionary within the territory.⁵¹ Copway left the United States soon after, perhaps in part because he sensed the coming battle over removal.⁵² The region was, indeed, dangerous for an Ojibwe missionary.

After the Treaty of 1842, the narrative arc of *Life, History, and Travels* is essentially closed. Returning to Canada a second time, the text records only a list of official positions, first at the Credit River and Saugeen Missions and then with the Indian Department. Copway briefly describes an intense moment when his young son, “about three years old” fell overboard a schooner en route to Saugeen Mission from Toronto, during which he jumps in to rescue the child.⁵³ The moment is fast and vivid, but surprisingly brief. Then, the narrative moves on. As Copway writes, “We now resumed our labors at the [Saugeen] Mission.”⁵⁴ The

significance of this moment, of these journeys, becomes secondary to the larger fate of the Ojibwe Nation.

With this movement completed, the story comes to a halt, and Copway concludes by describing the General Councils of the Christianized Ojibwe at Saugeen and then offering a sketch of the broader Ojibwe Nation. The ultimate direction of *Life, History, and Travels*, then, is toward a specific kind of what Gerald Vizenor terms survivance, or the manifest ways in which Native peoples rise above colonial simulations of Indian identity. Survivance, as Vizenor writes, can take multiple forms, from “the silence of heard stories, or the imagination of oral literature in translation” to “an aesthetic restoration of trickster hermeneutics.”⁵⁵ By adapting the rhetoric of travel writing to a sense of Ojibwe migration, mobility, and adaptation, Copway records another form of survivance—not of one individual, but of a modern, self-governing (and Christianized) Ojibwe nation. By traveling to the United States at precisely this historical juncture, Copway stepped into what we might think of as a massive reorganization of dynamic, well-established communities—a veritable whirlpool of (former) French trade, British colonial rule, and American treaties; of traditional Ojibwe beliefs, Jesuit missionaries, and Protestant conversions; and of diverse, subdivided groups entering new political alliances as a means of claiming agency. *Life, History, and Travels*, then, attempts to navigate the dramatic reorganization of communities, lands, and lifeworlds that was taking place while he traveled and wrote, and Copway uses the discourse of travel writing ultimately to imagine both a future for himself and for the people among whom he worked.

In some nineteenth-century travel books, experiences beyond home serve to unsettle some previously held sense of the world. In some of these texts, travel thus comes to reshape that view of the world from home. *Life, History, and Travels*, on the other hand, is centered around a *recollected* sense of home. By the time he returns in 1839, Copway's Rice Lake, the home that he cries for in that trying moment east of La Pointe, represents a connection that has changed, a way of living and being in the world that was reformed with his conversion and then strained and broken when he left home to labor among his “brethren,” “the Indians.” Copway's world, his environment, thus becomes a milieu of Christian faith, Ojibwe cultures, and networks of travel, trade, power, and discourse. For scholars of indigenous literature, culture, and history in the

Great Lakes region and beyond, Copway's travel writing thus represents one author's attempt to navigate his historical moment by utilizing the affordances of literary writing. His sense of homesickness, moreover, suggests a tribally specific, place-based response to colonialism and the rupture of his established ways of being and moving about in the world. In its intimations of conflicts over logging, mineral rights, and other "natural resources," *Life, History, and Travels* may also suggest potent connections between these experiences and the rising threat of ecological devastation already taking shape in the nineteenth century.

The form of *Life, History, and Travels*, the shape of Copway's prose as compared to other nineteenth-century travelogues published by white writers, reflects a structure of leaving home, looking back, and ultimately struggling to return. For him, returning to Rice Lake is not about physically traveling from the United States to Toronto and finally to his former home, but rather, about remembering the relatives, the connections, the enmeshment that he experienced as a child, which remain an indelible source of personal strength in his writing. In all his wandering, all of his work at missions throughout the region, and all of his glances toward home, Copway strives to come to terms with his own sense of a newly congealed Ojibwe Nation reeling in the wake of dramatic change. We must therefore read his travels not merely in terms of his political and professional maneuvering but also a deeply emotional effort to remain grounded, *placed*, in a time when navigating the world seemed like sailing "the wide ocean, without a compass, in the dark night."⁵⁵

JAKE MCGINNIS is Assistant Professor of Humanities at Graceland University, where he teaches courses in environmental humanities, US literature, and writing. His work has appeared in a variety of venues, including *The Concord Saunterer*, *ESQ: Journal of the American Renaissance*, and *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Sustainability*.

NOTES

1. "Ojibwe" is a broad term for several loosely affiliated groups of Native peoples living in the Great Lakes, on the Canadian prairies, and in the upper reaches of the Mississippi River basin, all of whom recognized distinct tribal identities. These groups have been known by various names throughout their territory, including the Mississaugas or Mississauga Ojibwe in southern Ontario, the Saulteaux in western Canada, and the Chippewas in the United States. Throughout their range, they gen-

erally refer to themselves as Anishinaabe (variously spelled), which loosely translates to "first people." In this chapter I use the most common English spelling, "Ojibwe," preserving Copway's spellings, usually "Ojebwa," in quotations from his writing. For histories of the Ojibwe peoples, see Thomas D. Peacock, Marlene Wisuri, and Winona LaDuke, *Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa: We Look in All Directions* (Afton Historical Society Press, 2001); and Peter S. Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (University of Toronto Press, 1991). Nineteenth-century histories of the Ojibwe written by Native authors include Peter Jones, *History of the Ojebway Indians: With Especial Reference to Their Conversion to Christianity* (A. W. Bennett, 1861) and Copway's own *Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (C. Gilpin, 1850). William W. Warren, of mixed Ojibwe-Metis and white descent, also wrote a nineteenth-century account of the Ojibwe, *History of the Ojibway People* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984, orig. published 1885).

2. George Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches of George Copway (Kahgegagahbowh)*, ed. A. LaVonne Brown and Donald B. Smith (University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 125. Citations are identified from this edition. Copway's autobiography was first published as *Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh (George Copway)* (1847). A slightly revised edition, which appended speeches and published letters, was published in 1850 under two titles: in New York as *The Life, Letters and Speeches of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh or, G. Copway, Chief Ojibway Nation* and in London as *Recollections of a Forest Life: or, the Life and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh, or George Copway, Chief of the Ojibway Nation*. In this article, I refer to the text by its earliest title, *Life, History, and Travels*.

3. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 125.

4. Cathy Rex, "Survivance and Fluidity: George Copway's *The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 18, no. 2 (2006), 5.

5. William Whipple Warren, born in La Pointe in 1825, perhaps reflecting on people like Copway, wrote that, "There are several villages of Indians in Upper Canada, who are sometimes denominated as Ojibways. . . . The connection existing between these and the Lake Superior and Mississippi Ojibways, is not very close, though they speak the same language, and call each other relatives." Warren, *History of the Ojibwe People*, 368.

6. Sense of place refers to individual and cultural relationships between people and geographies. See Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Blackwell, 2005), 62–96. See also Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 1977); and Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, eds., *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1993).

7. Like many authors of the nineteenth century, Copway regularly borrowed material from other published writing, particularly in *Running Sketches and Organization of a New Indian Territory*. His biography was likely edited by his wife Elizabeth, a white woman, but most scholars agree that *Life, History, and Travels* was his own work. See Donald B. Smith, "Kahgegagahbowh: Canada's First Literary Celebrity in

the United States” in *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, by George Copway, ed. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Donald B. Smith (University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 34–35.

8. Rex, “Survivance and Fluidity,” 2.

9. Bernd C. Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary-Writers in Antebellum America* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 236.

10. Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind*, 224.

11. Donald B. Smith, “The Life of George Copway,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 23, no. 3 (1988): 25, 29.

12. Smith, “Kahgegagahbowh,” 32–33.

13. Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 3.

14. Copway references this migration within *Life, History, and Travels*, where he proposes traveling in the western portions of the Ojibwe territory specifically to record the story in greater detail (89).

15. Lyons, *X-Marks*, 2.

16. Lyons, *X-Marks*, 2.

17. Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827–1863* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6.

18. Lyons, *X-Marks*, 12. Lyons is not alone in calling for a certain Native nationalism based on specific tribal traditions and cultures. In particular, see Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

19. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 87.

20. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 87–88.

21. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 88.

22. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 88.

23. On this point, see Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 192.

24. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 102.

25. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 101.

26. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 102.

27. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 73.

28. For a history of this criticism, see A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, “The Literary and Methodist Contexts of,” in *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, by George Copway, ed. Ruoff and Smith, 1–21.

29. Barry O’Connell, ed. *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 1–2. See also Ruoff, “Literary and Methodist Contexts,” 2–3.

30. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 103.

31. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 103.

32. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 103.

33. Copway invokes his father in a fit of homesickness just outside of La Pointe, Wisconsin, early in his career as a missionary (112). He is mentioned again only at the end of the book, in “A Geographical Sketch of the Ojebwa, or Chippeway Nation,” where Copway merely lists the surnames of three chiefs of the “Chippewas at

Rice Lake": Poudash, Copway, and Crow. Of his former home community, he writes: "These Indians belong to the same tribe, the Mississagas [*sic*], or Chippewas of Rice Lake, who, in 1818, surrendered the greater part of the tract now forming the New Castle District, for an annuity of 740. They have all been reclaimed from their primitive wandering life, and settled in their present locations in the last ten or twelve years. . . . The head chief of the tribe lives here. For some time these Indians were under the charge of an officer appointed by the Indian Department, who assisted in their settlement; but at present they have no special Superintendent" (157).

34. Hertha D. Sweet Wong, "Native American Life Writing," in *Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, ed. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133.

35. William Bevis, "Native American Novels: Homing In," in *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature* (University of California Press, 1987), 582.

36. My reading here has been influenced by Richard Scott Lyons, who argues that Copway's *Running Sketches of Men and Places, in England, France, Germany, Belgium, and Scotland* similarly reflects the conventions of nineteenth-century transatlantic travel writing. Lyons, "Migrations to Modernity: The Many Voices of George Copway's *Running Sketches of Men and Places, in England, France, Germany, Belgium, and Scotland*" in *The World, the Text, and the Indian: Global Dimensions of Native American Literature*, ed. Scott Richard Lyons (State University of New York Press, 2017).

37. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 105.

38. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 111.

39. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 111–12.

40. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 113.

41. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 116.

42. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 125.

43. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 135.

44. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 127.

45. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 128.

46. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 133.

47. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 138.

48. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 141.

49. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 142.

50. See "Ceded Territory Boundary" (Treaties of 1836, 1837, 1842 and 1854) [Map] (Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, January 2015), <https://data.glifwc.org/ceded/>.

51. Charles J. Kappler, ed. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. II (US Government Printing Office, 1904), 542–45.

52. Article III of the Treaty of 1842 mentions removal directly: "It is agreed by the parties of this treaty, that whenever the Indians shall be required to remove from the ceded district, all the unceded lands belonging to the Indians of Fond du Lac, Sandy Lake, and Mississippi bands, shall be the common property and home of all the Indians, property to this treaty." Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 543. On Copway's awareness of

removal, see Donald B. Smith, *Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), esp. 178–79.

53. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 144–45.

54. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 145.

55. Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (University of Nebraska Press, 199) 12, 14.

56. Copway, *Life, Letters, and Speeches*, 70.