

SAIL

Studies in American Indian Literatures

Series 2

Volume 12, Number 1

Spring 2000

Children's Literature

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Introduction

I am pleased to have been asked to contribute to this special issue of *SAIL* devoted to Native American literary works for young people. The past decade or so has seen another in the cyclical explosions of children's books being published in this area, this time focusing on nonfiction and reference books as well as fiction and storybooks of traditional legends and on environmental themes. The articles in this issue of *SAIL* address the fictional categories, as well as concerns about the accuracy and understanding of non-Native writers (and reviewers) misinterpreting Native values and cultures, or sanitizing aspects of traditional stories to be more palatable to the largely non-Native readers of these stories, both adult and juvenile. As several of the contributors to this issue point out, questions need to be asked when writing or reading these works: What was the purpose of the story for the people to whom it belongs? To whom was it being told? Who is it being retold for now? What lessons are implied or conveyed? Is that lesson still coming through in the retelling? Is it relevant to the contemporary audience? Has it been sanitized to make it more "accessible" to today's listeners? Does it still accurately reflect the values and images of the people who told it?

Stewart discusses variants of the Cinderella story as presented in three recent picture books and analyzes how they differ from European versions of the tale. She highlights how these differences can be used in classrooms to present information on Native values and cultures to school-

children.

In his examination of Forrest Carter's *Education of Little Tree*, Cherokee author Justice points out that the American public "has a profitable love affair with the image of 'the Indian,' but little love or interest in real Indians or their lives." He goes on to talk about how *Little Tree* has evolved from being perceived as a loved autobiography of Depression-era Cherokee mountain life to a work of fiction by a notorious white supremacist.

Debbie Reese confronts issues in reviewing children's books about Native Americans, fresh from the controversy over *My Heart is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose*, a deeply flawed fictional "memoir" of a young resident of Carlisle Indian School at the turn of the century (reviewed in this issue by MariJo Moore).

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, as exemplified in similar young adult novels by N. Scott Momaday and his mother, Natachee Scott Momaday, is discussed in the final essay by Jim Charles. And Peter Biedler reviews Louise Erdrich's answer to Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Birchbark House*.

Lisa A. Mitten

How Can This Be Cinderella if There is No Glass Slipper? Native American “Fairy Tales”

Michelle Pagni Stewart

If you ask most children in the United States to tell you the story of Cinderella, the answer will be remarkably similar: Cinderella has two mean stepsisters and a horrid stepmother who make her do their chores and treat her like a servant. They try to keep her from attending the prince's ball, but Cinderella's friends, the mice, make her a beautiful dress, which the step sisters ruin. A fairy godmother turns a pumpkin into a carriage and gives Cinderella a new dress so she can go to the ball, where she dances all evening with the prince. As the clock strikes midnight, Cinderella rushes from the ball, losing a slipper on the way, escaping only moments before her carriage becomes a pumpkin once again. When the prince searches for the mysterious woman who fits the glass shoe, the stepmother locks Cinderella in the attic; even though the cat tries to stop the mice from bringing Cinderella the key, she gets out just in time to race downstairs and prove she was the beautiful young woman who danced with the prince at the ball. Although the stepmother trips the prince's servant so that he drops and breaks the glass slipper, Cinderella produces the other slipper, which, of course, fits. She marries the prince, and they live happily ever after.

This, in fact, is only one version of Cinderella—Walt Disney's, to be exact—a retelling that came about late in the saga of the young orphaned girl who is rescued from servitude through marriage to royalty. Disney's well-known tale contains creations of his own, such as the well-developed characters of the mice, yet other aspects, such as the stepsisters, the

slipper and the fairy godmother, come from a rich tradition that varies depending on the teller of the tale and the culture from which it derives. In fact, folklorists have identified over 700 variants of “Cinderella” (Dundes vii). The incidents folklorists use to identify a “Cinderella” tale include a rich but worthy protagonist found in some sort of cinders-disguise who is treated poorly by family members; assistance in the form of magic or advice from a beast/bird/mother substitute; a transformation event (such as a dance/festival/church scene) where the otherwise dirty heroine is revealed in a display of beauty; and the heroine’s recognition through some sort of token, such as the slipper (Yolen 298). Many versions involve some sort of curfew, and some versions also entail a series of tasks the heroine must perform before she is allowed to attend the event or is recognized for her true worth. The ending, as is the case with most fairy tales, is a happy one. Not all tales identified as an Aarne-Thompson tale type 510A¹ contain all of these aspects, but they have the basic elements that categorize them as a “Cinderella-type” tale.

Not surprisingly, Native American variants of the Cinderella story abound,² several of which have been the subject of picture books for children in the last few years. These include *The Rough-Face Girl*, an Algonquin tale written by Rafe Martin and illustrated by David Shannon (1992); *Sootface: An Ojibwa Cinderella Story*, retold by Robert D. San Souci and illustrated by Dan San Souci (1994); and *The Turkey Girl*, retold by Penny Pollock and illustrated by Ed Young (1996). As is the case of much literature for children, the authors and illustrators of these picture books are predominantly white (Pollock’s father is a descendent of the Wyandotte tribe, an Iroquoian-speaking people from the Northeast, yet she is retelling a story from the Zuni Indians, a Pueblo tribe from the Southwest). To evaluate the literature to be sure that Native Americans and their practices and beliefs are not misrepresented or stereotyped, we should be concerned with the accuracy of the stories and illustrations, with the respect and understanding shown toward the culture, and with the quality of the story. In this paper I will address such issues, explaining how these three Cinderella picture books can have value for young readers and adult readers as well, even though some aspects of the books may be questionable.

Jon C. Stott’s *Native American Children’s Literature* discusses the problems that persist when one attempts to introduce children to Native Americans and their culture through children’s literature. In the past, books dealing with Native Americans—while perhaps well-meaning—were generally ignorant and offensive to the cultures the authors were

trying to depict (Stott 1-5). Many relied on the stereotypes propagated by Hollywood, so the Native American characters were depicted as primitive savages who needed to be reformed and civilized by the white culture, as murderers who must be killed to protect the Western “civilized” way of life, or as noble, nature-loving creatures whose simplicity and naivete were romanticized but which ultimately made the characters inferior to progressive whites.

In the push to incorporate a wider diversity of texts in the classroom, teachers and librarians have solicited more books with an ethnic background. On the one hand, this has been a positive goal, since children’s books today contain more diverse characters than Nancy Larrick discovered in 1965 when she criticized children’s literature for being predominantly white. (Larrick sought more books dealing with African American protagonists.) Yet, the problem with Native American children’s books is not an issue of the number of books but rather of their content. Mary Gloyne Byler argues that there are too many books about Native Americans, too many because they are not the kind of books we should be encouraging children to read if we want them to gain an accurate knowledge of Native American culture and history, and if we want them to be sensitive to the situation of contemporary Native Americans. She explains, “There are too many books featuring painted, whooping, befeathered Indians closing in on too many forts, maliciously attacking ‘peaceful’ settlers or simply leering menacingly from the background; too many books in which white benevolence is the only thing that saves the day for the incompetent, childlike Indian; too many stories setting forth what is ‘best’ for American Indians” (Hirschfelder 34-35). Thus, while some well-meaning adults might try to introduce children to Native American cultures with these books, the knowledge the children will gain will, in fact, be detrimental to the understanding of Native Americans.

Many critics locate the problem in the contents of the books that, while perhaps well-intentioned, perpetuate ignorant and stereotyped beliefs about Native Americans for children and adults alike. For example, Debbie Reese finds that, in addition to propagating Hollywood stereotypes (what she calls a “TV Indian”), books about Native Americans fail to make young readers aware of contemporary Native Americans and their way of life. Because books about Native Americans are largely set in the past, many children think Indians no longer exist (636-37). That the Native American way of life is romanticized in the past also encourages readers to ignore contemporary problems that befall Native Americans, some of which are similar to problems facing any contemporary American (that is, books

should recognize the human issues Native Americans face as well as the issues specific to them as Native Americans). Michael Dorris, too, criticized children's literature, which, he said, too often continues to treat Indians as if they are the property of children, a criticism surely aimed at Lynne Banks' *The Indian in the Cupboard* (Hirschfelder vii), a book so popular with children that it spawned a movie and a number of sequels. Stott delineates the problem with Banks' book (15-18), a problem that exists in many Native American children's books, even those currently being produced. As Stott explains, most picture books about Native Americans are produced by non-Natives (25). In the past, this often meant the books were replete with pernicious stereotypes and an overall message that would ultimately privilege Western beliefs and viewpoints rather than celebrating Native American beliefs and culture. Although some of today's authors who are not Native Americans seem to recognize the deficiencies in past books and undertake research before attempting to create their texts, this is where the problem arises: some authors do not do enough research to represent accurately the culture they are writing about, while others use research that itself is misinformed and racist. Thus many contemporary authors of books dealing with Native American culture continue to perpetuate misunderstandings and stereotypes, no matter how subtle.

Does this mean, then, that we should not let children read any books written by a non-Native? Does this mean that we should not let them read any books that are not wholly accurate? Therein lies the crux of the problem: while some Native authors are beginning to work in the field of children's literature (Joseph Bruchac, Michael Dorris and recently Louise Erdrich have contributed), the field is dominated by non-Natives. In Stott's study, for example, Native American authors accounted for less than 20% of the authors he studied. Thus we discover the first aspect of the dilemma: if we eliminate all non-native authors, our options for introducing young readers to Native American culture and stories would be sorely limited. What's more, we might actually be eliminating books that, while not written by Native Americans, are respectful of and accurate with regard to the culture.³ While Stott argues that we should reject inaccurate books, Joseph Bruchac, in his introduction to Stott's study, cautions us to avoid censorship, which, he says, does not resolve the real problem: "Understanding how a well-loved book, such as Lynne Banks' *The Indian in the Cupboard*, makes mistakes about Native people and reinforces stereotypes will give teachers the tools to discuss that book and others like it in a more useful, informed way" (xiii).

It seems the synthesis of these two ideas is the best way we should approach all children's books about Native Americans, including the Cinderella versions.⁴ If, by introducing these inaccuracies to students, a teacher only serves to reinforce them, then, of course, Stott is correct in suggesting the books not be used. However, in many cases, if the problems in the book aren't too pernicious, then Bruchac's idea that we should use these inaccuracies as teaching tools makes more sense. Children are more capable of thinking critically than many adults give them credit for. And they are probably more likely to look for inaccuracies and disrespect in other reading they do—and to be able to see past these problems—if they are introduced to some examples.⁵ (For, after all, we know that telling children something is generally less effective than showing them.) In this way, these three versions of Cinderella can be great teaching tools for helping children to understand Native American cultures and beliefs while at the same time making them aware of how the culture and beliefs can so easily be disrespected.

The three children's picture books depicting a Cinderella-type tale are of two versions. *The Rough-Face Girl* and *Sootface: An Ojibwa Cinderella Story*, both based on an Algonquin version of Cinderella,⁶ tell a similar story of a young girl without a mother whose two sisters (note these are not *step*-sisters) treat the youngest poorly, making her do chores and work by the fire. By throwing ashes on the youngest, they have scarred her face, thus her nicknames of Rough-Face Girl and Sootface. In these similar tales, all the girls in the village aspire to marry the corollary to the European prince: the Invisible Being in the first version, an invisible warrior in the second. Because the girl who has seen this invisible man will get to be his wife, his sister tests all the hopeful girls to see if they have actually seen him by asking what his bow is made of and a second question (what is the runner of his sleigh made of or how is his bow strung in these two versions). The protagonist's sisters lie and say they've seen the young man, but they fail the test because they cannot answer his sister's questions. Rough-Face/Sootface then dresses up (although in both cases, her dress is not glamorized the way Disney's Cinderella's is) and goes to meet the warrior's sister. Unlike the other girls in the village, her sisters included, the protagonist is able to answer the questions correctly and is thus able to marry the invisible young man.

A very different tale is told in *The Turkey Girl*, based on Pueblo versions of the folktale.⁷ This version starts off with a poor young girl who lives alone and takes care of the turkeys in her village. When she hears about the upcoming Dance of the Sacred Bird, she is eager to go,

but she thinks she does not belong at the dance. The turkeys, her friends, change her rags into a doeskin dress with shells on its hem and give her beaded moccasins for her feet. They even shower her with jewels, taken from the careless villagers who dropped them. In return for their help, they ask only that she not forget them, that she return before the sun sets to care for them. She promises. They tell her that if she breaks her word, they will seek their freedom. At the dance, the Turkey Girl is admired for her beauty, and she joins in the dancing. She keeps the turkeys in her thoughts for quite a while, but soon the music and the dancing entice her, and she begins to procrastinate. At one point, she thinks that she shouldn't have to leave the dance "for mere turkeys." She tries to justify her staying by asking, "Were they not just gabbling birds?" Alas, she waits too long and returns to find the gate open and the turkey pen empty. The turkeys had left because she had not kept her promise to them. The story ends by explaining this is why to this day turkeys live apart from humans.

Patricia J. Cianciolo, in her article, "Folktale Variants: Links to the Never-Ending Chain," explains how the nexus between cultures and stories can serve as a learning tool to help young readers understand cultures they are unfamiliar with or take pride in their culture if it is one that is being depicted. As Cianciolo argues, when young readers encounter a tale that they have heard again and again, they become more aware of small differences. These differences become obvious as features of the specific culture from which the tale derives (83). For example, readers of the Native American versions of Cinderella will find some aspects of the European variants conspicuously missing; for example, glass slippers would be impractical in a culture that is not waited on but instead spends a great deal of time ambulatory (in contrast to the upper class society depicted in some of the European tales). In fact, much has been made of the various shoe-tests in Cinderella tales,⁸ which are conspicuously missing in these Native American variants—most likely because footwear was more of a practical concern and the true test for an individual would be concerned with his/her inner strengths and beliefs, not his/her outerwear.

A more subtle addition in all Native American versions is an emphasis on rewarding those who speak the truth. In both *The Rough-Face Girl* and *Sootface*, the protagonist gets to marry the invisible warrior in part because she alone can really see him (she passes the test), but also because the other girls in the story lie and say they have seen him when, in fact, they have not. Because the protagonist in *The Rough-Face Girl* at first admits she does not see the warrior, the man's sister encourages the protagonist to proceed with the test because she does not lie and say she

has seen him. Then later, when she does finally see him, that becomes apparent to the sister because the protagonist doesn't have to make up answers to the questions she poses. Similarly, in *Sootface*, the protagonist does not lie about seeing the invisible hunter; in this case, she sees him coming toward her and asks the sister who he is before being asked the questions "What is his bow made of?" and "How is his bow strung?" (the latter question, although different from the one in *The Rough-Face Girl*, results in the same answer: the Milky Way).

While the story in *The Turkey Girl* is quite different, truth in the spoken word is again privileged. Contrary to the happy ending one finds in most Cinderellas, many readers are amazed to find in this Zuni Cinderella story that Cinderella does not marry a prince or invisible warrior (in fact, in this version, no correlation for the prince exists).⁹ When the protagonist promises the turkeys she will be home by dark and fails to keep her word, she is left alone. In this case, the differences in the tale suggest two significant values of the Native American culture: on the one hand, the girl does not keep her promise to the turkeys, so she is not true to her word and is therefore punished. Furthermore, she ignores her promise because she decides that she doesn't have to pay attention to the turkeys—they are mere birds. In so doing, she places herself above the turkeys, rather than recognizing the significance in life of animals as the Native American culture does. Thus her punishment is seen as just "reward" for her actions, in addition to explaining why, "From that day unto this, turkeys have lived apart from their tall brothers" (Pollock).

Since folktales derive from oral tradition and, until put in print, were passed on through word of mouth, the variants of Cinderella should reflect and respect the cultures from which they derive; as Cianciolo reminds us, the language should reflect the oral traditions (84). For if the language of Native American tales sounds like the stilted "you white man, me Injun" kind of language found in early texts and Hollywood movies, certainly one should be wary of the book or at least make young readers aware of the inaccuracy and artificiality of this language. In all three "Cinderella" versions, however, the stories flow nicely and young readers find the stories interesting; that the listener is engaged in the telling of the story aligns it with the oral tradition. All three versions also recognize the origins of the tale in the oral tradition. Yet the way the authors recognize their sources suggests something about each author's awareness of the Native American culture. For example, Martin explains in an author's note on the page opposite the initial page of the story that the tale he is telling is "actually part of a longer and more complex traditional story," yet that is

all he tells us of his sources.¹⁰ In contrast, San Souci, also in a note—but this time on a page opposite the dedications—explains that he is retelling a tale that originates from the Northeast and Great Lakes tribes, although he did find a Pueblo variant as well. What’s more, San Souci recognizes the actual sources of some of the versions he consulted, including versions from 1884, 1913, and 1979, and explains that the illustrations are based on research undertaken at the Anthropology Library of the University of California Berkeley, reflecting Ojibwa village life in the mid-eighteenth century. This note is significant in that it specifically cites sources for both the story and the illustrations, suggesting that both San Souci’s recognize the importance of accuracy in their work. That the writer consulted sources as far back as 1884 and as recent as 1979 also demonstrates that he is aware that time may or may not improve on the tales, depending on whether the earlier versions are accurate “translations” of oral tales or whether they, in fact, are heavily edited from a white bias. (The same, of course, can be said of the more recent versions: if newer sources rely on problematic retellings of tales, then they, too, can reflect inaccuracies in the stories.) That the illustrator researched Ojibwa life to create his pictures is commendable. Yet again, the accuracy of the source should always be scrutinized since those who study Native American history know how unrealistic and disrespectful many anthropologic sources have been. Furthermore, we see an awareness of the oral tradition from which the stories come when both San Souci and Pollock, on the cover of their books, identify themselves not as the writer of the stories, but as the teller, specifying that the stories are “retold.”

Pollock’s version, as well, shows an increasing awareness of and respect for Native American culture. Her author’s note is not given in small type, hidden on the pages before the story begins. Instead, her note is in the same font as the story and takes up a whole page, given after the dedications and publishing information. She informs the reader of her Native American background and explains why she chose to retell the Zuni version of Cinderella, in part because it “end[s] with the hard truth that when we break our trust with Mother Earth, we pay a price.” She also cites Frank Hamilton Cushing’s collection of Zuni folktales as the source for the story, which may set off some red lights for people who are aware that Cushing’s “translations” often included his own additions to the story.¹¹ While she hasn’t cited the number of retellings that San Souci does (in part, perhaps, because a number of Algonquian-speaking tribes have similar versions of the Sootface folktale while the Turkey Girl variant is not as abundant), her explanations of where the tale came from and why

she found it so interesting are included as part of the story, rather than hidden away, as if an afterthought. Any book which is based on a specific culture gains credibility by identifying its sources and the amount of research that the author undertook to ensure the story's accuracy.

An analysis of these three Cinderella versions, which came out in the 1990s, reveals that all three picture books demonstrate respect for Native American culture, even if the end results are not as accurate as they should be. The earliest, *Rough-Face Girl*, has received some negative criticism. Jon Stott criticized the book because the text situates the Algonquin tale on the shores of Lake Ontario, which is where Iroquois tribes, not Algonquin, lived (25). The *Kirkus* review from March 1, 1992, described the illustrations as "overliteral" and criticized the face of the Invisible Man as "intrusions rather than an integral part of the natural world" (*Rough-Face Girl*). I would also be sure to point out to young readers that the beginning and ending of the book sound more like the traditional European fairy tales than one should expect from a Native American tale. For example, the first line reads, "Once, long ago, there was a village by the shores of Lake Ontario," which hints of "once upon a time." The final page reads: "Then at last the Rough-Face Girl and the Invisible Being were married. They lived together in great gladness and were never parted." This line suggests the "happily ever after" ending found in many European fairy tales.¹² Some might find the prince-equivalent to be problematic in that he is named the Invisible Being, which sounds like a white's attempt at a Native American name. (In contrast, San Souci calls the character the invisible hunter, the invisible warrior or, simply the warrior—he is described in this way, but not named. Other versions use Invisible One, and one version names him Strong Wind, the Invisible.) The two sisters, who have been criticized for being depicted in a comical way, embody more of a European viewpoint whereas the protagonist embodies Native American values. Since we are meant to see the sisters as the "villains," perhaps the author was in this way making what was bad about them the assimilationist ideas that emphasize their beauty and the pretty clothes they wear. In contrast, the Rough-Face girl's clothes are mocked by the other people in her village, yet her faith in herself and her courage are depicted as worthy of emulation. And while feminists might decry the fact that the Rough-Face Girl must become beautiful at the end before she marries the Invisible Being, she is recognized for her inner beauty by the Invisible Being and his sister before the ugliness is washed away.

San Souci's 1994 *Sootface* tells a similar version of Cinderella, in part

because he tells an Ojibwa version of Cinderella, and the Ojibwa tribe is part of the Algonquian language family. San Souci's identification of his sources should make adult readers less wary of San Souci's retelling, despite his not being Native American himself, for the research indicates a respect for Native American culture as well as a recognition that oral tales—even if similar—differ based on the teller. And, in fact, San Souci's version, while perhaps not as immediately enticing in its pictures (most likely because San Souci emphasized authenticity, as opposed to David Shannon's pictures with their comical touches), proves to be a more captivating depiction of Native American storytelling. Carolyn Phelan finds it a "good choice for classes studying Native Americans or comparative folklore" and praises it for "read[ing] aloud well" (*Sootface*). And, in fact, San Souci's retelling seems more faithful to the Native American culture. The story's beginning and ending do not rely on European fairy tale models, and the male character is not given an artificial name but is instead identified as the invisible or the invisible warrior or simply the hunter. Furthermore, when the invisible warrior gives Sootface a new name, he is enacting an Ojibwa custom of renaming.

In contrast to these two stories is Penny Pollock's *The Turkey Girl* (1996), a Zuni tale Pollock found in a collection of Zuni folktales. The Pueblo Indian culture serves as an important backdrop to this variant, which contains many elements of Cinderella, but whose differences are much more startling—and more significant with respect to Native American culture and beliefs. To begin with, the protagonist in this tale is singled out within her culture, rather than ostracized by family members. She is befriended by a group of turkeys she takes care of, which highlights the Pueblo Indians' raising of livestock, something not emphasized with the Algonquian tribes. Most reviews of the book emphasize the colors that are seen as reflecting the Southwest backdrop of the tale.¹³ Ed Young's illustrations are most apt for an oral culture which would not want the pictures to replace the story found in the words. That the pictures are less distinct, in fact, makes this book the most oral-tradition based since both the words and the pictures do not fix the story so that it is forever after static. Students of oral tradition know that when one "captures" the story in words, one "fixes" it, in a sense, and the story will no longer have the vicissitude which characterizes oral tradition. While Shannon's and San Souci's illustrations limit the story to those pictures, in a sense, that is not the case with Young's illustrations, which allow the story to expand beyond the illustrations and the words, should a child's imagination—or a storyteller's—wish to improvise.

The version Pollock retells lacks a prince-like substitute, although, contrary to the Algonquian tales, it does contain a ball-like situation, in the form of a dance/ceremony. The Turkey Girl wishes to attend the dance but doesn't have the suitable clothing, so the turkeys—in the role of “fairy godmother”—give her the proper dress and tell her to enjoy herself but to be home before Sun-Father “returns to his sacred place” (this is the curfew found in many Cinderella stories). When the Turkey Girl promises not to forget about the turkeys, an important element of this variant and of Native American culture is introduced: honoring one's word. In fact, this is what first struck Pollock as significant about this tale: she says that she was forced to reconsider the Cinderella tales she had grown up with, ones in which Cinderella breaks her promise to be home before midnight but is still rewarded by marrying the prince. As Pollock explains, “To Native Americans, the Fairy Godmother becomes Mother Earth. No one can break a promise to Mother Earth without dire results” (Pollock, personal statement).¹⁴ I would argue that it is as important that the Turkey Girl is breaking a promise to the turkeys, for, in doing so, she has placed herself above the animals, which is contrary to Native American beliefs. Thus, the story does not end “happily ever after”; not only does Turkey Girl not marry, but, in fact, she is left alone, without her companion friends, the turkeys.

Most young readers quickly recognize the difference in the ending, but this is a perfect opportunity to discuss the significance of the difference and how it reflects the Native American culture. A Native American story would not reward someone who wasn't true to her word, nor would it reward someone who mistreated the turkeys as she does. The ending further emphasizes Native American oral tradition, for the last lines read: “From that day unto this, turkeys have lived apart from their tall brothers, for the Turkey Girl kept not her word. Thus shortens my story.” Many Native American tales help us to understand why things are the way they are (labeled a “pourquoi tale” in children's literature), which this story does.¹⁵ As important, the last line in a metafictional way emphasizes the storytelling tradition.

Certainly, then, introducing young readers to Native American oral traditions and beliefs through a story they are familiar with will encourage them to explore and understand other Native American stories, many more of which are beginning to be developed for young readers. As important, these Native American Cinderella variants may encourage them to question the beliefs that European fairy tales encourage: that a woman must be beautiful on the outside to marry a prince, that a woman can only find

happiness by marrying a prince, and that someone who does not keep her word will be rewarded, to name a few. In questioning such values, they become better readers of Native American culture as well as of their own culture. Those from Native American culture and from other ethnicities/races will also find reinforcement in that the heroine can look more like they do (rather than the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Disney variety) and act more like they do.¹⁶

Although each of these versions of Cinderella has problems of a varying degree with respect to the Native American culture that an adult reader should be aware of and make a child reader aware of, still, much can be gained by introducing young readers to these variants. Overall, there is more to be gained than lost with these books, especially if they encourage young readers to explore other and, we hope, better depictions of Native American cultures and stories. Several good bibliographies of Native American books for children, including those by Mary Gloyne Byler, Arlene B. Hirschfelder, Ginny Moore Kruse and Kathleen T. Horning, Beverly Slapin, Doris Seale, and Rosemary Gonzalez are in print, which should help make selections of culturally accurate and respectful books easier. But if using these Cinderella variants makes young readers more interested in exploring Native American cultures and stories—as I have found to be the case with adult readers, who are often hesitant to introduce their children or students to Native American stories because they know so little about the culture—then they will have served an important function in helping people take that first step to understanding more about Native American culture and life. While the slipper may not fit as well as we'd like it to, at least they're not afraid to try it on.

NOTES

¹ In 1961, Stith Thompson revised Antii Aarne's tale type index, which collected aspects of various folktales in order to categorize them along various story types. This is when the label "510A" was given to the tale commonly known in the United States as Cinderella (Dundes viii). Much of the history and various methods of typing the Cinderella tale are discussed in Alan Dundes' *Cinderella: A Casebook*. Because it is not my intention here to debate the origins of the Cinderella tale or even to justify these tales as Cinderella versions since the authors have identified them as such and thus young readers will, too, my remarks on these issues will

be limited.

² For ease of discussion, I will refer to the variants of this “cinder-girl” tale as Cinderella, although I do recognize this privileges the European versions of the tale. However, since this is the name most children (and adults) will recognize, it seems to be the best way to achieve understanding of the argument I am making.

³ Stott praises the work of Scott O’Dell and Jean Craighead George, authors of *Island of the Blue Dolphin* and *Julie of the Wolves*, respectively. Many find O’Dell and George to be strong advocates for Native beliefs and culture. I would add Sharon Creech’s *Walk Two Moons* to the list since the novel not only deals with aspects of Native beliefs in a contemporary setting but also employs a Native American literary structure: she writes in a non-linear, non-chronological manner, utilizing multiple viewpoints and retellings of Native American myths, and she even creates a trickster character.

⁴ Granted, some books may be so inaccurate and so disrespectful to the Native American culture that redeeming the book may be impossible. However, not all books that “make mistakes” are devoid of value, as Bruchac argues. As my argument suggests, children can often learn from these mistakes—as long as the mistakes are identified and explained, and as long as the mistakes are balanced with books that are respectful and “mistake-free.”

⁵ Of course, this presupposes that parents and teachers will be diligent in learning about the Native American cultures they are reading about as well as take the time to be aware of any potential problems with the books they read. Perhaps this is not as realistic an expectation as we would like it to be. But the more teachers, parents and concerned adults can make other teachers, friends and neighbors aware of these issues, the more likely it is that people will think about them when selecting books.

⁶ Similar versions can be found in *World Folktales: A Scribner Resource Collection* (edited by Atelia Clarkson and Gilbert B. Cross) and *The Talking Stone: An Anthology of Native American Tales and Legends* (edited by Dorothy de Wit). Likewise, a version found in *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*, a composition textbook edited by Lawrence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosens, follows the same basic storyline.

⁷ Joseph Bruchac and Gayle Ross have included their version of the tale, “The Poor Turkey Girl,” in *The Girl Who Married the Moon: Tales from Native North America*.

⁸ Poteine P. Bourboulis argues that “the most important feature in the fairy-story of Cinderella is the shoe-test” and points out that Andrew Lang contended that such a tale “could not have originated in a naked and shoeless race” (Dundes 103). In any case, it seems that those tales most likely to emphasize a shoe-test had origins in the Asian version of the tale since the Chinese culture is very foot- and shoe-conscious (106-07).

⁹ A colleague of mine insists that the Zuni version is not, in fact, a Cinderella tale in part because the protagonist fails the turkey’s test. She believes the test to be the most important part of a Cinderella tale. However, while most tales have some sort of token which allows the protagonist to be recognized as the heroine, it is the recognition of her identity that is key. In this case, I would argue, the Turkey Girl is recognized because of the results of her actions—in the Native American culture, she would not be rewarded for failing to live up to her promise; thus her failing the test is significant (and necessary) within the culture. She also learns something from this test, which makes her a “winner” even if she is not ultimately happily married. Just as the specific test often varies depending on the culture from which the variant originates, so, would I argue that the results in this case are culture-specific and thus do not keep the tale from fitting the “type.”

¹⁰ Although Martin doesn’t identify any source for his tale, I have found similar sources, as explained in a prior note.

¹¹ Granted, anyone familiar with oral tradition recognizes that, as part of the tradition, the stories may change with the teller; what makes Cushing’s additions problematic is that they were often Westernized additions which disrespected or at least misunderstood the culture whose tales he was putting into print (Ruoff 16).

¹² This reminds me of Thomas King’s playful depiction of various ways of beginning stories, found in *Green Grass, Running Water*: “Once upon a time,” “A long time ago in a faraway land,” “Many moons comechucka . . . hahahahahahahahahahaha,” and “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth” are all dismissed as the wrong way to begin stories.

¹³ Janice del Negro suggests the changing light indicates the “emotional tenor of the plot” while *Horn Book* indicates the colors evoke the isolation of the Southwest desert environment. *Kirkus Reviews* says the “pictures only hint of place, dress or culture but fully capture the story’s changing moods with floating, indistinct figures and strongly colored light.” (All reviews were found courtesy of amazon.com.) Sadly, some-

times the colored printing of the words makes them almost impossible to read.

¹⁴ Notice, though, that neither of the other two versions has the element of a curfew; thus, neither protagonist breaks her word and is still rewarded.

¹⁵ A version similar to the Algonquian tale (which cites as its origin *Canadian Wonder Tales* and does not identify any particular tribe) also has a “pourquoi tale” ending. In this version, the invisible warrior, named Strong Wind, punishes the sisters by changing them into aspen trees. The end of the tale thus explains why aspen leaves tremble with the wind, for the two sisters are afraid of their sister’s husband, Strong Wind, who is angry because they lied and treated their sister cruelly.

¹⁶ This is true of other cultures as well. Currently, Cinderella variants exist from a variety of cultures, including Chinese (*Yeh Shin*, written by Ai-Ling Louie and illustrated by Ed Young), Korean (*The Korean Cinderella*, written by Shirley Climo and illustrated by Ruth Heller), Egyptian (*The Egyptian Cinderella*, written by Shirley Climo and illustrated by Ruth Heller), Caribbean (*Cendrillon*, written by Robert D. San Souci and illustrated by Brian Pinkney), Persian (*The Persian Cinderella*, written by Shirley Climo and illustrated by Robert Florczak) and Middle Eastern (*The Golden Sandal*, written by Rebecca Hickox and illustrated by Will Hillenbrand), to name a few.

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A Lingering Miseducation: Confronting the Legacy of Little Tree

Daniel Heath Justice

I was twelve years old the first time I read Forrest (Asa) Carter's now-notorious novel, *The Education of Little Tree*. Our minister had given a copy of the book to my mother, and she was so moved by the story that she insisted I read it myself. At the time my favorite reading material included hobbits, dragons, and wizards; the last thing I wanted to read about was Indians, having long since accepted the idea of Indianness as something dull, primitive, and uncouth. But Mom was insistent. "It's a really beautiful story, a true story. It's about Cherokees," she told me. "It's about you."

Mom and I finally made a deal: she'd read one of my novels if I'd give *Little Tree* a try. With little enthusiasm I started reading. Six hours later I was reading it for a second time, still teary-eyed from the first session. *Little Tree* had cast its spell over me as well as my mother, and in the days and weeks that followed my dog-eared copy of the book went everywhere with me. I memorized favorite passages and took to imagining myself as Little Tree. The book was a sentimental vision of a life that somewhat reflected my own: my dad—twenty-one years older than my mother—was old enough to be my "Granpa," and as a hunter, occasional ranchhand, dedicated individualist, and my own guide to the mysteries of the mountains, he was every bit Carter's Granpa to my Little Tree; though Mom wasn't a fullblood Cherokee, she and I spent many hours in conversation about spirituality, morality, and history, just like Little Tree and Granma;

and I too was a mixedblood Cherokee boy who never felt more at ease than with my parents and dogs (who were pugs instead of huntin' hounds, but I didn't quibble with those little details). *Little Tree*, a fanciful story based on stereotypes and lies, written by a vocal anti-Semitic racist, had become a foundation of my Cherokee identity.

Crow Creek Sioux scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn once asked in reference to Native America, "Who gets to tell the stories?" As she acknowledges, who speaks is perhaps the most important question for Indian people today, "the political question of our time" (64). Issues of colonialism, land displacement and genocide, spiritual and cultural appropriation, and fragmentation are all part of this question, and the answers reveal a great deal about who we are as Americans, particularly Natives and Euroamericans. Cook-Lynn answers the question: "In regard to the Indian stories, there is plenty of evidence that what America wants is what America gets. "Dances with Wolves," *The Education of Little Tree*, Sam Gill, Arthur Kopit, James Fenimore Cooper and other assorted outrages" (61). This is not a recent phenomenon, as Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee) explains: "Native cultures—their voices systematically silenced—had no part in the ongoing discourse that evolved over several centuries to define the utterance 'Indian' within the language of the invaders" (7). Cook-Lynn's list could have been so much longer and included five hundred years of writers, politicians, and explorers, but those she mentions are certainly adequate to demonstrate the point that the general American public has a profitable love affair with the image of "the Indian," but little love or interest in real Indians or their lives.

A companion question to that asked by Cook-Lynn, and one of equal importance is this: *To whom are the stories told?* I don't mean the mass market that Cook-Lynn addresses in the accessory question to her first: "What is it America wants?" (61). Instead, the audience I'm concerned about is the one most often forgotten in discussions of authenticity issues and cultural (mis)appropriation: children. From books like *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *Two Little Savages* (written by one of the early leaders of the American Boy Scouts, Ernest Thompson Seton) come stories of howling savages, sullen squaws and noble braves, pinto horses and buffalo-hide tepees, and legions of faceless, nameless Indians fading away before the inevitable forward-march of Euroamerican civilization.

Euroamerican children have suffered greatly from these images, for the mythology of the Vanishing Indian creates both a monocultural blindness and assumptions of supremacy (what Ward Churchill¹ aptly titles

“Fantasies of the Master Race”) as well as a visceral horror of digging too far into American history and discovering that a) the “inevitable vanishing” was neither inevitable or complete, as the battles for and against colonization are still being fought at the end of the twentieth century; b) the march of “civilization” has revealed itself to be simply an exercise of oppression and violence, and has turned technology into as much an ecocidal system as one of genocide; and c), this generation of colonialists, the children who accept the privileges of colonialism without question, is every bit as much responsible for the dispossession and slaughter of Indian peoples as their ancestors, even if they didn’t do the shooting, raping, or removing themselves. This is a sad legacy for Euroamerican children to inherit, and with every new Indian-themed book published and film produced without regard to real Indians or real lives, they will continue to be educated into a centuries-old campaign of colonialist oppression.

With most of the protagonists of these books and films being white children and their families, there can be little surprise that white children readily embrace them. But the painful reality is that Indian children, too, experience the messages of these media, but without the accompanying message of cultural empowerment. Instead, Indian children learn that the continued existence of their peoples is a regrettable mistake; their identities and spiritual beliefs are backward, superstitious, and evil (or, in the case of the New Age movement, that their Indian identities and beliefs can be assumed, transformed, and sold without ethical consideration of their mother cultures); any questioning of the American myth of manifest destiny reveals the ignorance of the questioner, not the corrupt nature of the myth; and that, inevitably and hopefully sooner than later, all the Indians will either be wiped away from the mindscape of America, either through intermarriage or ideological and physical force. Churchill writes of these messages, and their influence over Indian children:

As the Oneida comedian Charlie Hill has observed, the portrayal of Indians in the cinema has been such that it has made the playing of “Cowboys and Indians” a favorite American childhood game. The object of the “sport” is for the “cowboys” to “kill” all the “Indians,” just like in the movies. A bitter irony associated with this is that Indian as well as non-Indian children heatedly demand to be identified as cowboys, a not unnatural outcome under the circumstances, but one which speaks volumes to the damage done to the American Indian self-concept by movie propaganda. The meaning of this, as

Hill notes, can best be appreciated if one were to imagine that the children were instead engaging in a game called “nazis and Jews.” (240)

This self-hating narrative of play is simply a youthful retelling of the invasion of Native America. The political complications and implications of such a seemingly-innocent pastime as “Cowboys and Indians” are clear, especially when the images of each are defined by the conqueror culture.

Mom and Dad always laugh when they tell the story: When I was about four years old, we were in a small cafe in Black Hawk, Colorado, where my parents brought me along for breakfast with a Lakota man who knew my family from Dad’s trucking days. I sat through the meal without a word, all the while glaring at the stranger with undisguised hatred. When my mother asked if I had to go to the bathroom, I nodded, then moved to the man and said with as much contempt as my four-year-old voice could muster, “Hey, my Daddy don’t like Indians.”

The man and my father both laughed, and Mom smiled as she said, “But honey, your Daddy *is* an Indian.”

I threw myself on the floor of the crowded restaurant and screamed, “My daddy is NOT an Indian! My daddy is NOT an Indian!”

By now Mom was mortified, Dad and his friend were laughing, and I was hysterical. Mom grabbed me in my flailing tantrum and said firmly, “Yes, he is, and that makes *you* an Indian, too.”

I stopped suddenly, tears and sweat and snot running down my face, my breath rising and falling in hiccuping gasps. I was silent for a moment and then said, “So that makes me a little Indian boy, doesn’t it, Mommy?” My face broke out into a wide smile, and I finally allowed my mother to lead me to the restroom.

I’ve often thought about that event, and I’ve tried to figure out why a young child growing up with a Cherokee father and mountain-bred mother would be so surprised to discover his dad’s Native heritage. I’ve wondered why I was so terrified at the thought of his Indianness but not my own. And I’ve seen in our lives how that fear can split people into multiple selves of varying social acceptability, and alienate us from those we both love and need the most.

Forrest (Asa) Carter’s *The Education of Little Tree* is a prime example of non-Indian-defined, Indian-themed literature. The long-acclaimed coming-of-age story of a young boy who goes to live with his half-Cherokee “Granpa” and fullblood “Granma” in the Appalachian wilds upon the death

of his parents, *Little Tree* was cataloged by the Library of Congress as primarily a youth biography. If children weren't the intended audience, their interest soon became apparent. In his introduction to the University of New Mexico Press edition, Cherokee legal scholar Rennard Strickland writes:

Little Tree found its first and most loyal readership among those who cared about the young, about "growing up" . . . Teenagers took to the book almost as a cult. The values as well as the prose touched many who didn't usually read. Younger children found *Little Tree* on their own. Librarians began to find *Little Tree* missing from the shelves. Students of Native American life discovered the book to be as accurate as it was mystical and romantic. Elementary-school teachers learned that *Little Tree* fascinated their seemingly world-weary charges.
(vi)

Teachers integrated the book into their curricula, following the example of educators like Ruth Anne Edmunds and Mary M. Moynihan.² Two different audio tape versions of the book, one unabridged, were made to further capitalize on the novel's popularity.

In his essay, "*The Education of Little Tree: What It Really Reveals About the Public Schools*," Michael Marker explores the popularity of *Little Tree* in schools, particularly its use as a foundational text in multicultural education:

The message is perfectly clear: Indians are no longer the continent's indigenous people; they are only one of many colorful groups in the great American melting pot. Indians are just like the rest of us. They like to hunt, make moonshine, gather wild herbs in season, and have a close relationship with the earth. In short, they are a lot like the hill people in the Tennessee mountains, with Indian stuff added to their lives as a kind of cultural spice. (226)

Diversity issues merely become quaint color to a whitewashed American mythos, a national identity that depends upon obscuring the histories of people of color, women, and political and sexual minorities. As Marker continues:

Even if teachers knew where to find the people and materials that could introduce their students to genuine and substantial aspects of

Indian culture, they couldn't present the information in the context of their classrooms. The ideas would be unintelligible and unacceptable to a group of teachers charged with maintaining and justifying the multitude of inequities in a class-based society. (226)

With texts like *Little Tree*, school systems can claim a multicultural focus without any confrontation of issues of power, violence, or oppression. The perspective of the students returns to the hegemony of Euroamerican values, all the while shrouded in the self-satisfaction of superficial diversity awareness.

Carter's apparent ability to dissect racist Euroamerican culture through his simple, down-to-earth characters, poetic narrative, and insightful observations about the world set *The Education of Little Tree* on the quick path of becoming a minor classic of Native American literature, even driving its publication sales to "close to a million copies, more copies sold than *The Way to Rainy Mountain* by N. Scott Momaday, which once was the best seller at the University of New Mexico Press" (Vizenor 116). When a stereotype-ridden work like *Little Tree* is more popular among the American public than a masterpiece like *Rainy Mountain*, Momaday's exploration and evocation of his own identity as a Kiowa man, the depth of anti-Indian sentiment in America is made manifest.³

The gentle praise of *Little Tree* ended in 1991 when questions about the work's authenticity as autobiography that had surfaced over a decade earlier were finally taken seriously. Emory University Professor Dan T. Carter, a biographer of Alabama governor George Wallace, revealed to the *New York Times* that Forrest Carter, the obscure half-Cherokee author of *Little Tree*, was in fact Asa Carter, an anti-Semitic racist, terrorist, and author of Wallace's notorious "segregation forever" speech. Advertised as autobiography, and read with the knowledge of Carter's violent racism and in conjunction with his other works, as journalist Dana Rubin asserts, *The Education of Little Tree* represents

an extreme kind of Jeffersonian political attitude that can be extended in any number of directions. To the left, it intersects with liberalism and multiculturalism; to the right, with libertarianism and anarchism. Out of context, the book might sound like a New Age manifesto But viewed in the context of Carter's life and writings, *The Education of Little Tree* is the same right-wing story he had been telling all along. (96)

Little Tree gave me the first positive sense of my Cherokee identity, but the legacy of that sense has been problematic. There is no way to escape the reality of Carter's fraud, nor the truth that there is nothing very Cherokee about it.⁴ Throughout the book Carter connects the deceptively benign world and "Cherokee" philosophies of *Little Tree* to his own racist beliefs with remarkable success, though with a veil of kindness, tolerance, and respect. The novel's popularity depends upon and encourages long-established and damaging stereotypes. Because Carter meets the reader's expectations through these stereotypes, the image becomes the reality, and the reality becomes artificial and indistinct. The construction assumes a hyper-reality with which Native authors, most of whom strongly critique colonialism and its legacies, cannot compete. Carter constructs an "Indianness" that borrows shrewdly from the Noble Savage and generic, pan-Indian images, while giving the characters an historical (albeit skewed) context and some novel attributes to veil most of the stereotypes he manipulates.

Carter's racist history is something that he was unable to fully manipulate. Though never prosecuted for his involvement, Carter was tied to the attack on Nat King Cole during a performance in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1956; the brutal beating and castration of Edward Aaron, an African American man chosen at random to receive the frustrated fury of Carter's band of Klansmen (condemned by other members as being too radical); and the shooting of three former followers who had grown uncomfortable with Carter's extremism.⁵ According to Rubin, Carter's political stance was "chilling":

On the issue of race, Carter was ruthless. To him, white supremacy was the foundation for law, order, and civilization. Racial equality would lead to race mixing, or "mongrelization," which was against the laws of nature and God . . . the civil rights movement was a concoction of world Jewry—the impetus behind the liberal tide that was threatening American democracy. In Carter's view, blacks were to be pitied, but Jews were to be feared. Blaming them had a kind of dark logic; how else could you explain why previously docile Negroes would suddenly revolt? (81)

Carter's support of segregation and his affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan appeared to many as an almost irreconcilable contradiction to the virtues of understanding, tolerance, and kindness seen in *Little Tree*. This perceived contradiction occurs largely because Carter continually positions

Little Tree and his family as the agents of morality against the general immorality of their white neighbors. However, there is ample evidence of Carter's continued post-*Little Tree* racism and anti-Semitism, as well as significant problems in the text, such as Carter's romanticization of Indians. One of his acquaintances makes this underlying theme explicit:

Blacks, [Carter] said, were undeserving compared with the patient and brave Indians, who had suffered terrible wrongs inflicted by the Yankees. "I heard him say many times that blacks don't know how it is to be mistreated," says Buddy Barnett, Asa's friend from childhood . . . "The Indians have suffered more." (Rubin 81)

Looking at *Little Tree* as evidence of a midlife conversion (rather than accepting his moral corruption) forces the reader to ignore or minimize the true horror of his past and the tragedy of his final years in Texas, when he was consumed with a desire to claim his constructed Indian identity and tormented by his enduring hatred of Jews, blacks, and the wealthy white literary establishment that had so long rejected him. During one public speech, to which he had been invited to speak about *Little Tree* and his supposed life as a Cherokee, and at which he arrived drunk, Carter referred to a fellow speaker as "a good ol' Jew girl" (Rubin 80). And his opinions about African Americans did not change from his days as a brutal Klansman; they were simply veiled in his continuing masquerade:

His easygoing humor was a facade he had adopted to preserve the mask. An Abilene friend, Louise Green, remembers hearing Carter rage about blacks more than once. At a steakhouse in Abilene, Carter flew into a nasty tirade. "He said he didn't want anybody to take care of his poor old mother, and he didn't want to take care of 'some nigger's old mother either,'" Green says. On and on he went, louder and louder, about how "the niggers ought to go back to Africa," until other diners began to glare. (96)

The masquerade was incomplete. Carter was a violent man who lived hard, hated hard, and died hard, choking to death on his own vomit after a drunken argument with his son. This is hardly the image of the sensitive little half-Cherokee boy who is taught to love and respect himself and others. Carter's life was one example after another of direct aggression or subtle propaganda against those he deemed unacceptable.

My dad grew up on the eastern plains of Colorado, in and around a

little town called Ordway. It was the era of the Great Depression, the time of the great serialized Westerns, when the good guy wore white, the bad guy wore black, and the “Injun” was the pillaging fiend of the wild, wild West. It’s no coincidence that the other supposed “good guys” who wore white and fought against dark villains were a strong influence on the social climate of the day: the Ku Klux Klan. Their hats were a little taller and their rituals more ornate, but the messages of threat, white purity, and subjugation of the “wrong kind of people” were the same. My grandmother was doubly suspect, as she was both Indian and Catholic. Dad gave me her rosary; the beads and crucifix are black.

Dad was a dark-skinned Cherokee boy in a dirt-poor farming community that was largely white and uneducated, where racism was the standard practice of the day. He was an experienced fighter from an early age; he had to be just to survive.

Hey, blanketass!

Look, it’s Chief Pee-Pee Running Water!

How! Me heap-big brave, Tonto!

Goddamm Injun. Worthless. Backward. Lawless.

Savage.

Indian.

Every day was a battle, but not only at school. Home posed its own difficulties. My grandfather Jake, a “half-breed,” never acknowledged his own Cherokee blood—or that of his children—and was as proudly racist as any of his white neighbors, in spite of his dark skin and thick dark hair. He wasn’t Indian: he was “Black Dutch.” My grandmother Pearl, to shield her son and daughter from the rampant prejudice of the plains, wouldn’t allow them to enroll in the Cherokee Nation (though they chose to later in life, as did I). Assimilation was the only hope she saw for them; she had given up much of her own Cherokee identity years before to survive an unhappy marriage, far from home and community. The occupation of Alcatraz and the tragedy of Wounded Knee II were far in the future, and even the immediate effects of Roosevelt’s “Indian New Deal” weren’t a reality in her life. Her world was now white, and she believed that the well-being of her children depended upon that fact. The memory of the Trail of Tears, allotment, and other US social and political policies against the Cherokees was still too fresh, too tangible to forget, no matter how much she wanted to.

In spite of the revelations and controversy about Carter, *The Education of Little Tree* remains a top seller at New Mexico Press, and was made into a feature family film by Paramount Pictures in 1997, with James Crom-

well as (the now wholly-white) Granpa, Tantoo Cardinal as Granma, Graham Greene as Willow John, and Joseph Ashton as Little Tree. The book is still taught in college, high school, and elementary school classrooms, and it is still believed by many to be an authentic autobiography. The University of New Mexico Press has apparently made little attempt to inform those who have purchased the novel since the revelations of 1991, in spite of Strickland's offer to write a new introduction which, while praising, would have brought attention to the controversy. The Press, as of November 1998, is still printing the book with Strickland's original introduction, although the hardcover dust jacket features the following apparent compromise:

Much of the lore passed from generation to generation by word of mouth is found in these stories in *The Education of Little Tree*, autobiographical if not all factually accurate. For instance, Granma is based on family memories of Carter's great-great-great grandmother . . . who was a full Cherokee, combined with the author's own mother, who read Shakespeare to him when he was a child. But Granpa is all and forever true in this storyteller's memoir of a time that ended when Little Tree was ten and Granpa died.

Carter, who proudly acknowledged his lineage from fallen heroes of the Confederacy and took his sylvan-sounding pseudonym from Nathan Bedford Forrest, the founder of the original Ku Klux Klan, found this Indian identity a useful tool in expressing his racist ideology.⁶

The stereotypes and inaccuracies of Carter's depiction of Cherokee culture has been well-established. While Cherokee writer Robert J. Conley explains that in Cherokee culture "the sense of community is much stronger than the sense of the worth of the individual" (xii), Carter's Indians live apart from their tribal community as much in spirit and philosophy as in geographic proximity. Granpa, Granma, Little Tree, and Willow John are the only Indians around; reference to "the Nation" in Oklahoma is always with scorn or sadness. No mention is made of the Eastern Band of Cherokees in North Carolina. Carter's Indians claim to carry the memory and "Way" of their people, but only as a vanished or vanishing memory. The tribal community is dead in *Little Tree*, and none of the so-called Cherokees seem interested in reclaiming it.⁷ Instead of "[i]ndividual worth [being] defined in a community context" (xii), their worth exists wholly in their individuality. This fits well with Carter's belief in staunch individuality and libertarian self-reliance. His resistance to centralized power is as

apparent in his approach to the United States government as it is in the governments of the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band.

Granpa is the Noble Trickster, Granma the dignified Indian Princess (and a Cherokee Princess, no less!), and Little Tree is just what so many generations of Boy Scouts have dreamed themselves to be: the Little Brave roaming wild in the forest, with few rules and all sorts of generic “Indian” woodlore to consume and exploit. In most ways they are generic Indians, with few if any attributes that are distinctly Cherokee. None of them have any connection to the Cherokee clan system, which would have been quite unusual for Cherokees like Granma and Granpa during that time period, as historian John R. Finger points out:

Anthropologists found clear evidence of a continuing clan identity. Gilbert estimated that in 1931-32 more than half the people on the reservation [Qualla Boundary, in North Carolina] still had such affiliations, and in a majority of the families he surveyed spouses belonged to different clans. . . . And in a random sampling of conservative full-bloods in 1935-36, Leonard Bloom found that older Indians knew both their own clans (inherited from their mothers) and their fathers’. (68-69)

Even if Granpa and Granma are not staunch conservatives, Carter presents their parents as being so, for they are some of the Cherokees who evaded Removal (just like those of the Eastern Band). And, given their admonition to Little Tree that “If ye don’t know the past, then ye will not have a future. If ye don’t know where your people have been, then ye won’t know where your people are going” (40), Granma and Granpa would certainly have some knowledge of the clan system of their family.

This fictionalization of Native lives and histories poses a very real threat to Native America, for it creates powerful stereotypes of Indians (what Anishinaabe writer and critic Gerald Vizenor calls “interimage simulations”) that take on a white cultural reality that is seen as more “authentic” than the realities of living, sovereign American Indians. While Strickland sees *Little Tree* as neither “the work of a bigot nor . . . a metaphor for segregation,” he readily asserts that “Asa Carter’s childhood had nothing to do with *The Education of Little Tree*” (in Reid 16) and that the advertisement of the book “as autobiography cuts the threads of truth and turns history into another variety of fiction” (18). Cherokee-Quapaw/Chickasaw literary scholar Geary Hobson is less complementary about *Little Tree*, believing the book to be “second-rate literature, and not

at all from a Cherokee sensibility” (69). He endorses legitimate Cherokee writers such as Robert J. Conley and the late Carroll Arnett (Gogisgi), as well as white writer Joyce Rockwood, who “displays more understanding of Cherokee culture and world view than Carter could even dream of, proving that a good writer doesn’t even have to pretend (as Carter did) to be Cherokee to be able to write convincingly about the people” (70). Rather than criticize all non-Indian writers of Indian issues, Hobson asserts that truth and real understanding are far more vital to a legitimate presentation than bogus claims of fabricated “Indianness.”

There is little consensus, even among Cherokees, about the value of *The Education of Little Tree*. In her book *Living Stories of the Cherokee* (1998), folklorist Barbara R. Duncan writes that when “a woman asked Freeman Owle, after a storytelling performance, what she could read to understand ‘the mind’ of the Cherokee, he suggested reading James Mooney’s *Myths and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokee* and Forrest Carter’s *The Education of Little Tree*” (Duncan 25). Duncan doesn’t seem to be aware of the controversy over the book, and there’s no evidence to suggest irony in Owle’s response to the woman (see note 4).

This isn’t necessarily surprising, for Indians still come to the book with appreciation of its apparently positive depiction of Indian life in the 1930s, while others see it as just another example of white appropriation of Native identity. *Little Tree* speaks to stereotypes that aren’t rejected by all Indians; after all, the Noble Savage is much less degrading than his ignoble counterpart who runs around scalping everyone and burning their wagons and cabins to the ground. According to Modoc writer Michael Dorris, these stereotypes are manifest in the “popular and persistent folk belief [that] The Indian is, among other things, male, red-skinned, stoic, taciturn, ecologically aware, and a great user of metaphor” (46). The Noble Savage is in touch with the sacred ways of the Earth; he (almost always a male) is sought after by whites and thus possesses something that they don’t have quite yet; he is also a wise, understanding, sometimes humorous sachem who is admired by all and a true leader to a noble yet broken people. Such are the images evoked by the Noble Savage, and while there are many problems with this figure, it is still a more benign and ego-enriching role than that of the rabid savage that does nothing but howl and slaughter whites and his fellow tribespeople.

In spite of any its superficial benevolence and proclaimed appreciation for Indians, we know *The Education of Little Tree* (and Forrest Carter himself) to be fiction. Granpa’s lesson to Little Tree becomes an ironic one for the informed reader: “Go by his *tone*, and ye’ll know if he’s mean and

lying” (79). We went by the kindness of his tone and still found him to be a liar.

Forrest Carter will not be the last best-selling simulation of an Indian, nor will he be the last non-Indian to redefine Indianness through white privilege and overt or implied claims of white entitlement. And as long as such writers are simply dismissed as crackpots, fools, or monsters, the masquerade will continue its damaging work. As Vizenor points out, too many critics emphasize “trivia rather than . . . an authentic critique of the autopers, those posers who were so admired by readers, even honored by librarians and teachers for their *indian* simulations. The critical issue is racist fraud, not trivial literary reviews and reductions” (117). This is best seen by perusing the “Native American” or “New Age” sections of your local bookstore to find the books on Indian history, culture, spirituality, and literature: most of the books are written by Euroamericans for a Euroamerican audience, reshaping the traditions and beliefs of indigenous peoples as only those in economic and social privilege can, yet this hardly stems the lucrative tide of Indian-themed tomes. According to historian Donald L. Fixico (Shawnee, Sac & Fox, Seminole, and Muscogee Creek), of the more than “30,000 manuscripts . . . published about American Indians . . . more than 90 percent of that literature has been written by non-Indians” (86). Many have been and are by white scholars and writers; many others by “wannabes” and posers.

Carter finds his greatest popularity in such a culture. *Little Tree* contains all the stereotypes of Indians discussed previously, such as the Noble Savage, the Indian Princess, and the Squaw, as well as the one image that surpasses all others in both Euroamerican acceptance and danger to Indian peoples: that of the Vanishing Indian. All of the Indians in the novel die except Little Tree, and he ends the narrative wandering across the United States, unconnected to his people in the southeast or in Oklahoma, unconnected to any Indians but those who have died. The utter elimination of Indians from the world sustains this vision, where the only Indians are white guys playing Indian.

My family is *Tsalagi*—Cherokee —*Ani-yunwiya*, the Real People. Many generations have suffered from the stereotypes that *Little Tree* draws upon, stereotypes that find their deepest grasp in the minds and spirits of the children. We have spent many years resisting colonialist intrusions into our lives, histories, and identities, to varying degrees of success, sometimes with strategies that would make true understanding more difficult for the children and grandchildren who would follow. Until 1996, my parents and I didn’t know that *The Education of Little Tree* was

a fraud; three generations of removal kept us ignorant of who we are among our people. But we know now. We've reclaimed the story from Asa Carter and others like him who would define Indians out of existence and take their place as the indigenes of the Americas. We're reestablishing connections with our kin in the Nation and beyond, and we're reading authors like Cook-Lynn, Vizenor, Owens, Wendy Rose, Diane Glancy, Marilou Awiakta, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, Sherman Alexie, D'Arcy McNickle, and other Indians who tell their own stories. The time of *Little Tree* is at an end; the voices have escaped. We know the truth: the stories are ours, and we will be the ones to tell them. That's where the *real* education begins.

NOTES

¹ The controversy that surrounds Churchill and his own Cherokee identity is certainly complex, particularly when one is citing him as a source for an essay involving the appropriation of Indian identity. However, three factors weigh heavily in my choice of citing Churchill's work: first, he's unafraid to say many things that should be heard, even if they're unpleasant for Euroamericans to face; second, although often criticized, he's also been highly praised by tribal people throughout Indian Country, and he has been accepted as both an Indian and an advocate for Native rights by many; third, and most important, he's now an enrolled member of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokees—if the Keetoowahs say he's a tribal member, and if we believe that tribes have the sovereign right to define who is and isn't a member of their communities, then it seems to me only right to acknowledge his work and his voice in the larger Native community. This acknowledgment doesn't make him or his work any less complicated, but it certainly places the critical focus where it belongs: on issues of tribal sovereignty.

² See Ruth Ann Edmunds, "*The Education of Little Tree: A Novel Study for Literature Based Instruction Master of Education Project*" (Charlotte, NC: Queen's College, March 1992), and Mary M. Moynihan's review of *Little Tree* and its applicability for teaching sociology courses (*Teaching Sociology* 19.1 (Jan. 1991): 110-112). Both of these pieces were published before the revelations of Carter's true identity were widely revealed.

Some educators have found the controversy itself to be a worthy teaching tool, such as Catherine Raymaker, whose online project sheet on

Little Tree confronts the stereotypes of the text directly while encouraging students to perform significant and insightful research into Native American issues: <<http://www.umcs.maine.edu/~orono/collaborative/education.html>>

³ Another example is the contrast between two recent films, one that focuses on Indians, the other including Native American, Chicano, and African American peoples. The film version of *Little Tree*, which, though not commercially successful, was produced by Paramount Pictures six years after Carter's true identity was revealed, has found its niche in the world of stereotyped Indianness. On the other hand, the powerful independent film *Follow Me Home* (written and directed by first time director and Native activist Peter Bratt)—a film that unflinchingly explores the devastating effects of colonialism on women and people of color, and how the colonizers have turned us against ourselves and others—has yet to find a distributor in the United States. Bratt's artistry isn't gentle or coy; he presents the experiences of many American minorities with honesty that frightens many Euroamericans. In such a case, the values of America's "entertainment" industry are quite clear: status quo at all times. Give the ethnic people a few bones, a Russell Means or a Salma Hayek, but nothing that would seriously question the distribution of power and resources in the United States.

⁴ There are many Cherokees who disagree, particularly those who still live in the southeast, such as members of the Eastern Band. In a conversation with an Eastern Cherokee elder at a literature conference in the fall of 1999, I learned that *The Education of Little Tree* is highly regarded by many Eastern Cherokees as an authentic picture of their lives, in spite of the admittedly problematic aspects of both the book and its author. After over four hundred years of contact, conflict, intermarriage, and acculturation, Appalachian Cherokees share many cultural traits and traditions with their non-Indian neighbors, so the lack of strong tribal specificity wouldn't necessarily be evidence of fraud. And even Carter's racism isn't necessarily evidence that he wasn't Cherokee—there are racists within Indian communities, just as there are racists within all ethnic groups.

While this knowledge doesn't change my own opinion of the text or its author, I'm certainly less inclined to dismiss the work completely. There does seem to be a significant difference between Western Cherokees and our Eastern kin in our responses to *Little Tree* (particularly after the revelations about Carter's life); further study of this difference would provide

a fascinating understanding of the post-Removal cultural and philosophical differences between geographically diverse Cherokee communities.

⁵ The most comprehensive study of this period of Carter's life is Dan T. Carter's essay, "Southern History, American Fiction: The Secret Life of Southwestern Novelist Forrest Carter," *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction*, eds. Lothar Hönnighausen and Valeria Gennaro Lerda (Tübingen: Francke, 1993): 286-304.

⁶ By connecting the fallen Confederate cause to the unarguable treachery experienced by Native nations from the United States government, Carter attempted to provide a strong moral ground for his virulent worldview. Thus, in *Little Tree*, Granpa's own father joins "the Confederate raider, John Hunt Morgan, to fight the faraway, faceless monster of 'guvmint,' that threatened his people and his cabin" (44). While genetically white, he is presented as much an Indian as his wife Red Wing, thus effecting the same transformation as the fully-white but spiritually Cherokee Granpa in the film version of *Little Tree*. In battle Granpa's "Pa" gives "the rebel Indian yell rumbling from his chest and out his throat, screaming, savage" (44). His people "were mountain bred. They did not lust for land, or profit, but loved the freedom of the mountains, as did the Cherokee" (43). Late in life, his body mangled by old war wounds, "the wild scream of the exulting rebel's challenge to hated government would come from his throat and he would die. Forty years it had taken the 'guvmint' lead to kill him" (45). And, while Granpa is hallucinating from the effects of a rattlesnake bite, he tells the story of an incident during his childhood when northern Regulators and Union troops viciously attack a nice, peaceful Confederate family, who are so nice and kind that, while they have little money or food, care for an old African American man who dies in defense of his nice, kind, peaceful white protectors.

In *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, Carter's other widely-known novel, the main Indian character is the Cherokee Lone Watie, fictional cousin to the real Stand Watie, controversial political activist of the Cherokee Nation, the only Indian general of the South, and the last general of the Confederacy to surrender during the Civil War. In this book Carter states that when "the War between the States had burst over the nation, the Cherokee naturally sided with the Confederacy against the hated government that had deprived him of his mountain home" (58). This selective use of history obscures the complex reality of the Cherokee alliance with the Confederacy: in spite of numerous appeals to the federal government by Chief John Ross, who worked hard to remain allied to the Union, federal

troops withdrew from Indian Territory early in the War, thus leaving Cherokees unprotected from roaming brigands of whites and Indians, Watie's own Native troops, and the armies of the South. The Cherokee Nation was sharply divided over the question of joining the Confederacy, with the majority in opposition. Without support from the United States, the Nation had little choice but to join with the southern states. After the war, true to Chief Ross's predictions, the Cherokees and the other Indian nations who sided with the South were brutally punished by the federal government for the choice, further weakening the sovereignty and cohesion of the tribes.

⁷ By contrast, the film version of *Little Tree* ends with Willow John taking Little Tree under his care upon the death of Granma and Granpa. The narrator—the now-adult Little Tree—even tells of traveling to visit and work with his Cherokee kin in Oklahoma. (In the book he and Blue Boy “made it to the Nations, where there was no Nation” [215].) Rather than the death-knell ending of the novel, the film provides a significant revision, one in which the Indians actually survive and continue being Indians.

Contesting Ideology in Children's Book Reviewing

Debbie Reese

Introduction

I began reviewing children's literature for the *Horn Book Guide*, a children's literature review journal, in the summer of 1996. At that time, Horn Book, Inc., was looking for someone with expertise in children's literature about Native Americans to write reviews of those books. A local school librarian familiar with my work suggested the Horn Book editors contact me, which they did. I submitted a writing sample and soon after, the managing editor of the *Horn Book Guide* sent me a set of books to review. By email, she sent me a message: "Mainly we're concerned that the review briefly describes the book, including artwork or photographs, and provides some critical comments." Several months later, a review I submitted was rejected by the editor-in-chief. In this paper, I will present the context for the rejection and discuss the results of a study I conducted following the rejection of my review.

My identity, experiences, and research

I am Pueblo Indian, from Nambe, a small Pueblo in northern New Mexico. Surrounded by my family and relatives, I was raised traditionally on our reservation in New Mexico, which means that my elders guided me as I took part in traditional ceremonial and religious activities. After high school graduation, I moved away from the Pueblo to work on my bachelor's degree in elementary education. I began teaching in public schools, but

the majority of my teaching was in boarding schools for Native American children in Anadarko, Oklahoma and Santa Fe, New Mexico. My husband and I met while teaching at Santa Fe Indian School; we married and have one child, Liz, who is in elementary school.

Before moving to Illinois we lived at Nambe, in an adobe home passed on to me from my grandparents and parents. Since her birth, Liz has taken part in traditional spiritual ceremonies and strongly identifies with her Pueblo heritage. When she was three, we moved to Champaign, Illinois, to work on our graduate degrees. In Champaign, we were among a handful of Native American people living there. In preschool, Liz saw children “play Indian” on the school playground as they chased each other, calling out war whoops. One day, she said to her classmates that she would be Pocahontas in their dramatic play (this was shortly after Disney released the animated film), but they told her that she could not be a *real* Native American because “your skin isn’t dark and your hair isn’t black.” Liz did not fit their conceptual understanding of what an Indian looks like. In an effort to determine where they might be getting the information their concepts are based on, I looked critically at the societal context.

The University of Illinois’s athletic teams are the “Fighting Illini.” Each year a student is chosen to be “Chief Illiniwek.” Dressed in a feathered headdress and fringed buckskin, UIUC’s “Chief Illiniwek” dances barefoot at half-time during football and basketball games. The people of Champaign-Urbana embrace the Chief image and incorporate it into their business. His image is everywhere: from clothing, book bags, and posters, to vans and storefronts of local merchants. At least fifty-eight businesses include the word “Illini” in their name. The phone book lists everything from the Illini Battery Corporation to Illini Wallprinters, Inc.

Native American students at the University as well as numerous Native American organizations across the country protest the use of Native American stereotypes as mascots for sporting and athletic teams. Such stereotypes are not limited to sports mascots. Stereotypes of Native Americans appear in books, movies, and on television. They appear in mass market children’s books for sale at department stores (e.g., *Clifford’s Halloween*, by Norman Bridwell) and in children’s books for sale at book stores (e.g., *George and Martha: Encore*, by James Marshall). They appear in children’s television programs (see, for example, the *Muppet Babies* episode about the Transcontinental Railroad) and movies (Disney’s *Peter Pan*). Within our family there is a heightened awareness of the prevalence of these stereotypes, perhaps because we are far from the Pueblo—far from friends, relatives, and others who know what Native

American people are like.

In our first two years in Illinois encounters with stereotypes in and out of preschool caused Liz intense discomfort. Her teacher talked of her “tantrums” at preschool, an indicator that Liz was not “ready” for kindergarten. This teacher was unable to see the connection between what she described as “tantrums” with the reality that, often, Liz was forced to assert and defend her identity as a Native American. The “play Indian” activities Liz witnessed in school and the stereotypical images of Native Americans in other contexts used to make her feel angry and hurt. Now, however, she rolls her eyes, points them out to her teacher, friend, or classmate, says “That’s a stereotype” and moves on. She has learned to cope with them.

As a beginning doctoral student at the University of Illinois, I wanted to study children’s literature and literacy in the home. But Liz’s experiences and my interactions with adults in the University and community setting made it clear that members of the community held powerfully entrenched stereotypical ideas of Native American culture. Instead of literacy in the home, I chose to study images of Native Americans in children’s literature.

Through my research, I learned there are predominantly three stereotypes of Native Americans in children’s literature (Dorris vii, Flaste 3, Hirschfelder 422, MacCann 150, Slapin & Seale 1). The first is typically referred to as the aggressive savage. He appears in books about the western frontier where bloodthirsty Indians attack innocent settlers for no apparent reason. Wielding his tomahawk or bow and arrow, he kidnaps children and scalps or kills their parents. He usually rides a horse and lives in a teepee. The second is the romantic, or noble Indian. He is the admirable image of a being who exists in harmony with nature. He is able to communicate with birds, animals, rocks, and trees. When he hunts, he uses every part of the animal and nothing goes to waste. He has mystical powers that allow him to know and see things others cannot see. He is the perfect hero and role model for an environmentally conscious America. In both cases, the Indian is usually shown wearing a feathered headdress and is partially dressed in fringed buckskin. Berkhoffer documents the prevalence of this depiction in American history in his book *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. The third way Native American stereotypes are present in children’s literature is through characters wearing Indian attire. The character is usually a non-Native child or an animal. Sometimes the character is shown wearing Indian clothes because he/she is playing Cowboys and

Indians.

As I began to write and share what I was learning with others, I began to receive invitations from local teachers who invited me to visit their elementary school classrooms to talk with their students about Native American culture. These classroom visits provided me with an excellent opportunity to assess children's understandings and concepts of Native American people. As noted earlier, these schools are located in a part of Illinois where the Native American population is extremely small. Consequently, most children do not have the opportunity to interact with Native people in the context of their daily life experiences. During these visits, children make such comments as: "How did you get here? Do you have a car?" "Yes. A red one!" "But Indians don't have cars. They have horses."

These comments reflect the stereotyped images of Native Americans in picture books, television programs, movies, and other commercial institutions that use Native American symbolism to promote their products. Taken together, these images are powerful enough to suggest to children that a Native American in the 1990's should look, behave, and live just as the stereotyped images look, behave, and live. These images are so powerful and long-lasting, that an intelligent college senior in journalism told me he was "blown away" when he first met a Native person, because "He was just a guy! And he was wearing a baseball cap! And his skin wasn't even red!"

As part of my professional activities I conduct workshops for teachers and librarians on children's literature about Native Americans, and on how teachers can authentically teach about Native Americans. Teachers are learning to recognize stereotypes—not just of Native Americans, but of many different ethnic groups as well. As they discard books that contain stereotypical representations of people of color, they seek culturally authentic literature. Fortunately, the numbers of such books are increasing, with many of them published by small presses like Oyate, Greenfield Review Press, and Lee & Low. With greater frequency, teaching journals and magazines include articles suggesting that teachers use children's literature to provide meaningful instruction about other cultures. With more and more teachers looking for children's literature to supplement their instruction, school librarians are working to develop collections that meet the needs of the teachers and students they serve.

To reiterate the key points I have made thus far: 1) many non-Native children have inaccurate concepts about Native Americans that are based on or reinforced by stereotypical representations, 2) a Native American child can be hurt when she sees stereotypical representations, 3) teachers

want to provide children with accurate information about other cultures and use children's literature to help them accomplish this goal, and 4) librarians want to help teachers by developing and maintaining a collection responsive to their instructional needs.

The review of *Birthday Bear*

Originally published in Europe (written by Antonie Schneider; illustrated by Uli Waas), *Birthday Bear* is a picture storybook in which two white children visit their grandparents in the country to celebrate the boy's seventh birthday. He is fascinated with Indians, and throughout the book, he is reading an Indian adventure story. In the story, the children put on headbands and feathers, hide, and then leap out from the bushes, waving tomahawks in a mock attack of their grandfather as he rides by on his bicycle. My review of the book included a statement that provided details of the play Indian theme and identified this depiction as an objectionable stereotype of Native Americans.

Soon after submitting the review, I learned that Roger Sutton, the editor-in-chief, had read the book and my review and decided the play Indian part of *Birthday Bear* was so peripheral to the story that the book should not have been assigned to me in the first place (I am the reviewer designated to review books about Native Americans). He reassigned the book to an in-house reviewer. I was stunned by this decision and sent the following email message to the managing editor who assigns books:

I have been reflecting on your message, and am troubled by Roger's decision to do an in-house review of the *Birthday Bear* book. The play Indian part of the book may be peripheral to him, but it is most certainly not to me. Surely he is aware that the play Indian theme figures prominently in the writing of those who work against stereotypes of Native Americans!

In my research, I specifically LOOK for books that are not Native American in their central theme, but incorporate the play Indian theme into the story line. These are, in my opinion (but also in the opinion of other multicultural scholars), particularly problematic because they subtly carry on and reinforce the notions that we are working most hard to dispel.

In this period of increased attention to diversity and multicultural education within our classrooms and society in general, I think it is even more important that we help others become aware of these issues and how they appear in children's books.

Furthermore, when my daughter, who strongly identifies with her Pueblo Indian heritage, sees illustrations in books of characters playing Indian, she slams the book shut. Yes, she is my daughter, and my work is a powerful influence on her. However, that is her reaction, and as a child in the United States, shouldn't we pay attention to her reactions, and do something about it?

Most recently, we found such an image in a George and Martha book she borrowed from her school library.

Birthday Bear, and other children's books that have subplots of children or characters playing Indian are the VERY ONES I WANT TO SEE!!! In my role as a reviewer for Horn Book, it strikes me as logical to send me these books in addition to the ones that focus on Native American culture.

Within a few days, Sutton replied:

I wanted to write to you to explain why I felt we could not use your review of Schneider's *Birthday Bear*. I totally understand your *objection* to the "playing Indian" theme of the story, and, yes, I'm aware that scholars and critics are concerned with this issue. It is important that this criticism be made—but not in the Horn Book Guide. We cannot give a negative review to a book because we object to its content, because of what it is "about." To do so would be a violation of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights and its various Freedom to Read statements. Here is Point Two of the LBR: "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

While the Horn Book is not a library, libraries and librarians are our primary audience, using our publications to assist in the book selection process—so we follow their rules. And I'm glad we do so. Your daughter doesn't want to read George and Martha? That's fine—but does that mean no child should read George and Martha? Beginning in the 1960s, many critics started scrutinizing children's books in regard to their "images" of blacks, Native Americans, Latinos, the disabled, women, gays and lesbians, and other groups that had faced discrimination and were agitating for their rights. This was and is valuable work, but we can't allow it to dictate library selection. One person's "right image" is another person's "stereotype," and we have

to allow readers to make their own decisions.

I think *Birthday Bear* is a mediocre book, with cliched situations (such as the Indian war-whooping), flat writing, and a predictable plot formula. But we can't tell our subscribers not to buy it because the characters should not have been "playing Indian." That's a socio-political criticism that goes beyond our defined arena of book reviewing for school and public library selectors. We review books not on the basis of what they say, but on how well we judge them to say it.

Roger Sutton, Editor-in-Chief, Horn Book

His decision to reject the review was based on the following points. First, my review identified the play Indian theme as a stereotypical representation of Native Americans. He described this as "socio-political criticism that does not belong in a literary review." Second, he believes the word stereotype is subjective, and that one person's stereotype can be another person's role model! Third, he believes that identifying the play Indian theme as an objectionable stereotypic will negatively influence a librarian's purchasing decision which is, ultimately, an effort on my part to censor the distribution of books that contain information I personally find offensive. Finally, he believes the book does not stereotype Native Americans but that it shows non-Indian children engaged in fantasy play based on stereotyped images of Indians. He states that this is an important distinction because the author has accurately portrayed the way children play Indian, and so, a reviewer cannot criticize the book based on inaccurate presentation of content.

His status in the field as editor-in-chief of Horn Book, Inc. (the premier children's review journal in the United States), the force of his arguments, and his use of the First Amendment as support for his arguments were convincing, but only if I held children in abeyance, and literature itself in a vacuum. An ideology disconnected from children and people of color seemed to be guiding his decision-making process.

The study

Based on my work with librarians and teachers, I believe there was a mismatch between Sutton's editorial policy and the needs of librarians and teachers who use reviews to select books about Native Americans, or with content related to Native Americans. To test my belief, I designed and administered a two-part study to find out what librarians and teachers expect to find in reviews of children's books. The first part of the study included a review of the literature on children's book reviewing, and the

second part consisted of in-depth interviews with public school librarians and a survey of subscribers to an internet listserv devoted to a discussion of children's literature.

The review of children's books and multicultural literature

In recent years, there has been an explosion in the number of children's books being published. Estimates indicate that between 4,500 and 6000 children's books are published each year (Cullinan vii, Horning, Kruse & Schliesman 8). Children themselves rarely purchase children's literature (Kayden 156); public and school libraries are the major purchasers of children's books (Briley 109, Horning 3). Because of the volume of books being published, Hearne notes that librarians must make book choices quickly and effectively (2). To aid in the book selection process, librarians often turn to review journals (Harrington 30, Hearne 2). Several professional journals are dedicated to the review of children's literature. Among the more widely distributed journals are *Horn Book Magazine*, *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, and *Kirkus Reviews*. With ever-tightening budgets, Walford writes "librarians look for critical reviews as a guide to what is really worthwhile purchasing" (9). Kiefer writes "the written text and the design are integral parts of the picture book and must be evaluated along with the illustrations" (78). Townsend states that reviewers provide a "consumer guide for potential buyers of books" (179). Schomberg expects a book review to include descriptive and objective statements about plot, characters, theme and illustrations, but she also expects a review to address potential appeal, curricular use, and possible controversial aspects of the book (41). As more and more teachers and schools move towards resource-based instruction (as opposed to textbook-based instruction), school librarians and the collections they maintain and develop are assuming a more significant role in the educational curriculum (Harrington 28, Schomberg 40). Librarians want to make informed choices and allocate limited library budgets in ways that enhance and enrich children's collections (Harrington 30, Kellman 202).

One way that children's literature has become enriched in recent years is through the increase in multiethnic children's literature, including literature about Native Americans. Advocates argue that at its best, multicultural literature meets the highest literary standards and helps all children learn about themselves and others in an increasingly diverse society (Sims Bishop 3-4). The quality and quantity of multicultural literature has increased over the past two decades (Harris 18). Norton writes that it helps

all children understand and respect the artistic contributions of people from many different cultural backgrounds (28). “Educators and parents alike maintain a strong belief in the power of literature to affect the minds and hearts of its readers, particularly when those readers are children and youth” (Bishop 40). Bishop continues: “all children who read or are read to need to see themselves reflected as part of humanity. If they are not, or if their reflections are distorted and ridiculous, there is the danger that they will absorb negative messages about themselves and people like them. Those who see only themselves or who are exposed to errors and misrepresentations are miseducated into a false sense of superiority, and the harm is doubly done” (43). Multiethnic literature can also help children stretch their cultural and historical imaginations and give them encouragement to view the world critically, from the perspectives of people long ignored (Bigelow 277).

Advocates of multiethnic literature note that while there has been an increase in the number of such books available, much remains undone overall. Horning and Kruse note that most children’s book editorial departments are composed of people whose backgrounds are Euroamerican, and most children’s and young adult book review journals use reviewers whose understanding of races and cultures other than their own is shaped by the prevailing images and ideas in the dominant experience (7). This points to a need for publishing houses and book review journals to add qualified people from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds to their editorial and review staffs.

Interview and survey questions

The study included in-depth interviews with two elementary school librarians and an open-ended survey of subscribers to *child_lit*, an internet listserv maintained by a professor at Rutgers University. In both the interviews and survey, participants were asked to reply and or discuss a series of questions about reviews of children’s books and what they expect to learn from those reviews. Questions were developed based on information gleaned from the literature review. Some specific questions posed were:

- 1) Do librarians want reviews to include sociopolitical (sometimes referred to as extra-literary) criticism as well as literary criticism?
- 2) What do librarians look for in a review of a children’s book with respect to representations of Native Americans?
- 3) What image comes to mind when a librarian hears the phrase “ste-

reotype of a Native American”?

Participants in the study included elementary, middle school, college or public librarians; professors of children’s literature; professional journal or book editors; reviewers; teachers; authors; and college students.

Sociopolitical versus literary criticism

The questions that addressed the content of reviews immediately elicited a statement that sociopolitical criticism of children’s books is part of the “politically correct” movement. An editor stated:

Do people who object to stereotypes really want to insist on books in which we have rounded individual portraits, warts and all? Or are they using the term “stereotype” to really mean “harmful”? Well if that is so, we open a whole other can of worms. Harmful to whom? Who gets to judge? . . . Do we really want reviewers to judge books on their potential for social effects?

A few other participants who view it as an unanswerable question echoed his question of “who gets to judge” and in this view, sociopolitical criticism loses its validity.

His remarks sparked many replies about the social effects of literature. A librarian noted that part of what distinguishes a well-written book from one that is mediocre is its ability to invoke feelings, joy or sadness, in the reader. He noted that when a book has this effect on a reader, it is praised. However, when someone criticizes the same book because it causes negative feelings in a reader who is a person of color, that criticism is dismissed as politically correct. The librarian asked, “Isn’t this a double standard?”

Several librarians say that it is not possible to separate extra-literary from literary criticism. One librarian views an author’s use of stereotypes as lazy writing, in which an author relies on what “everyone knows” instead of authentic characterization. She expects a reviewer to note the presence of ethnic stereotypes, and that doing so is not “political correctness” but is “within the proper realm of the reviewer.”

In response to a participant who suggested reviewers use phrases common to literary criticism (such as “lazy writing” or “poor characterization” or “using stock characters”) as an alternative to the word stereotype, many replied that any of those terms would have the same negative effect on their purchasing decision. A reviewer’s judgment is just that—

a judgment. These terms, including stereotype, are seen as literary, not sociopolitical.

One librarian's comment concisely reflected the comments of many: "Why not call a spade a spade?" Another said the review journals' history of not attending to ethnic stereotypes in children's books has resulted in a proliferation of books that contain stereotypes and their attendant factual errors. Specifically, she referred to books that show Navajo hogans facing all directions and situated among saguaros. (Navajo hogans are oriented according to specific religious guidelines, and saguaros are not found in the area in which Navajo people live.)

The use of the word stereotype in a children's book review

Sixty-six percent (33 of 50) of participants want reviews to include the word "stereotype" if the reviewer identifies one in the book. Of those thirty-three, twenty-two are practicing librarians. Sixteen percent (8 of 50) of participants want reviews to include the word stereotype only if the review includes details that support the use of the word. Of those eight, three are practicing librarians. Eighteen percent, or 9 participants, do not want reviews to include the word "stereotype." Of those nine, one is a librarian.

Most participants in the study are school librarians who work with children. In that role, they want to be aware of problematic aspects in books. As they read reviews of books they may add to their collections, they want as much information as possible before selecting books to purchase.

There is considerable tension with respect to the influence of the word "stereotype" on their purchasing decisions. Some indicate that this word can be the "kiss of death" for a book. However, most librarians cross-check reviews, using more than one review to inform their final decision on any given book. The librarians resent the implication that they respond automatically to the word stereotype, believing their informed professional judgment is called into question if the editor feels he must keep that word out of a review.

Many of the librarians would purchase a book with a stereotype in it, if there were other factors that override the stereotype. For example, one librarian referred to *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*. The book has a positive message about caring for the environment that she feels overrides the inaccurate and stereotyped illustrations of Native Americans. Still others would purchase a book with stereotypes to use as a visual aid to teach children about stereotypes.

Most librarians find the use of the word helpful in their book selection process. Some note that current reviews of classics help them understand issues raised by scholars of multicultural literature, thereby helping them develop a perspective that is culturally sensitive. Librarians want to be forewarned that an image in a book may be problematic when viewed from a multicultural perspective. They indicate a review of a classic or newly published book can provide that warning.

Further, they do not view their decision not to purchase a book that contains stereotypes as censorship. They indicate they are careful to keep foremost in their mind their professional responsibility to provide a wide range of materials, even when they go against their personal values.

What is a review for, anyway?

All the librarians indicate they fully expect a review to point out flaws in a book, and feel the reviewer is not doing his/her job if they fail to point out inaccuracies or other problematic aspects of the book, including the presence of stereotypes. One librarian's comments summarized the discussion:

As to the idea that the use of the term [stereotype] might affect a librarian's decision to purchase the book, well, correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't that the purpose of a book review? The whole idea of professional review journals like *Publishers Weekly* or *School Library Journal* is to recommend which books a librarian or interested reader might want to purchase or not to purchase. This has nothing to do with censorship whatsoever. If you write a review that says a book is badly written or has stereotypical characters, you're giving your honest opinion, which is what you're being paid to do. If the book you're reviewing has clearly stereotypical characters and you don't point it out, then you've failed in your purpose as a reviewer.

Another wrote:

When books are carelessly and thoughtlessly done, I fault the writers, illustrators, editors, and publishers, and I would fault a reviewer, too, for not pointing what he or she sees as problems with a book.

Many indicated that if a reviewer cannot provide his/her perspective, even if it is negative, then there is no reason to consult reviews. One librarian said she counts on reviews to inform her of good and bad aspects

of books, and if she cannot read negative reviews, then she need only consult the glowing comments in a publisher's sale catalog.

What participants describe as a stereotype of a Native American

On their understanding of what is meant by "stereotype of a Native American," I grouped participant responses by similarity, and the following categories emerged: The "all good" Indian with a noted absence of traits that reflect negatively on his character. The "all bad" Indian with a noted absence of traits that reflect positively on his character. This stereotype may be a drunken, lazy reservation Indian, who sponges off government hand-outs. The "generic" Indian who has no features identifying his tribal affiliation. This stereotype suggests there is only one kind of Indian. Whether the Indian is "all good" or "all bad" or "generic," he wears a feather headdress, moccasins, leather loincloth. He carries a bow and arrow or a tomahawk. His costume inaccurately combines elements from different tribes.

People of color

Librarians would like to see more people of color involved in the authorship, illustration, publication, and review of children's literature. As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, culturally and ethnically, librarians are very much aware of the need to address the needs of children they serve. Many express a need to hear the perspectives of professionals who study multicultural literature, and/or who are professionals as well as people of color. Many of the librarians indicated they received their professional librarian training before issues related to diversity in children's literature were part of the standard curriculum in training programs. They report that reviews inform their understanding as well as help them make purchasing decisions.

Correlation between participants' position on the word stereotype and their careers

Those who want and expect a reviewer to use the word stereotype in a review are, for the most part, teachers and librarians. Their private messages to me are eloquent and reflect the body of librarians as caring individuals who work with children. In their messages, they discussed the power of images. They believe images have the power to inform and/or cause harm, and that as adults, they have a social responsibility to educate and protect children. They firmly believe it is not helpful, useful, or appropriate to evaluate a children's book from a purely literary perspec-

tive. These individuals believe a focus on literary quality without regard for the social effects of a book is irresponsible.

In contrast, those who most strongly object to the use of the word stereotype in a review are, for the most part, authors, editors, and reviewers. These individuals spend vast amounts of time selecting words to communicate ideas. They subscribe to the concepts of artistic and intellectual freedom. These individuals advocate for the author's right to create a work that is free of social and/or political constraint, even if that work may be deemed offensive, harmful, or problematic to a child reading the book. These individuals are more concerned with "how well" something is said than with "what" it says. This is a purely literary view. Individuals within this group are not convinced that stereotyped visual images in children's books are harmful to children, either the children whose culture is being stereotypically represented, or other children who are viewing and absorbing those images. They point out that no research has been done that proves that stereotyped images in children's literature are hurtful or harmful. Moreover, even if it were someday proven that books cause social effects, these individuals argue that children should not be "protected" from the ills of society, and that attempts to protect them fail to allow them the growth that can happen when they come upon something that causes them pain.

The weight of their arguments against sociopolitical criticism rests on the question of "who gets to identify" a portrayal of an ethnic culture as flawed or inaccurate, and the basis on which that judgment is made. They do not believe any single person can make that call, and by extension, sociopolitical criticism is not valid and has no place in a literary review of a children's book. Their ideological stance is based on the right of free speech. As such, this ideology negates any criticism based on social effects as invalid and identifies this criticism as a threat to the right of free speech. Their stance is "unbudgeable" and absolutist.

The first viewpoint, the one of librarians, coincides with MacCann's in *Social Responsibility in Librarianship*. She writes that as public servants, librarians have a responsibility to be aware of cultural shifts and not view their work as "absolute." She says the record of service to minority groups is "a record of negligence at best, and extreme cultural arrogance at worst" (1). This record of service can be better, and the findings in this study indicate that librarians are attempting to improve the quality of their collections with respect to cultural accuracy and sensitivity. MacCann notes that this viewpoint has its challengers. Some see social responsibility as a threat to intellectual freedom. That is similar to the

arguments against sociopolitical criticism found in this study.

By electing to stand on freedom of speech and the fear of censorship, people who hold to this ideology are adhering to structures that hinder the growth of the quality of children's literature. Proponents of multicultural literature want better literature, free of positive or negative ethnic stereotypes that fail to provide children with an accurate picture of people of color. Proponents of multicultural literature believe the literature can only become better if we allow books to be criticized for their content as well as their literary aspects.

Correlation between position on the word stereotype and public statement of position

This is perhaps the most interesting and revealing finding of this study. Most of the individuals (21 of the 33) who want reviewers to use the word stereotype in a review chose to say so in a private, not public, email message. None of the participants indicated why they chose to send the message directly to me, but the contrast was so significant that it merits discussion. Any discussion of race or ethnicity or culture quickly moves from a professional discussion to one that is personal. Those opposed to multiculturalism are quick to assume that anyone who advocates for multiculturalism is doing so, not from an informed, professional perspective, but from a personal one. Nobody likes to put himself or herself at risk for personal attacks. Understandably, people who believe sociopolitical criticism belongs in a literary review chose not to express that viewpoint publicly.

Conclusion

In this conclusion, I am characterizing participants in this study in one of two ways: as members of the "culture of education" or the "culture of literature." Teachers and librarians are members of the "culture of education." As a former teacher, I include myself in that culture. Authors, editors, and reviewers are members of the "culture of literature." Although I could also be categorized as a reviewer, I place myself foremost as an advocate of multicultural education whose perspectives fit best in the culture of education. Granted, the findings of this study and these characterizations cannot be generalized to a larger population, but within the context of this study, I believe they are accurate enough to illuminate the polarized positions any discussion of multiculturalism tends to invoke.

In the "culture of education" we are very concerned with cultural

diversity and how we can meet the needs of the children we teach. We want to help children learn accurate information about cultures different from their own. We want to help children of color see accurate representations of their cultures in their books. We do not hesitate to use the word stereotype, are aware of many different kinds of stereotypes, and actively work to address (if not eliminate) their presence in the classroom. I contrast this with the “culture of literature” in which there are different concerns, such as intellectual freedom, freedom of speech, and censorship. Its members equate the concept of freedom embodied in the “culture of literature” with what it means to be an American. They view any attempt to close down on these freedoms within the context of children’s literature as a very real danger to the American ideals of freedom and our concept of democracy. This ideology is what Toni Morrison calls “willful critical blindness,” in which Euroamericans consider themselves and their evaluations to be unracial (18).

This study illuminates the conflict between the “culture of education” and the “culture of literature.” As many school librarians know, teachers are turning to the library, seeking children’s literature to supplement their instruction. Countless articles suggest how teachers can use children’s literature in their social studies, reading, and math instruction. We are in a period with growing cultural diversity, when teachers are using children’s literature more and more in their classrooms. Children’s literature is becoming a larger part of the classroom curriculum than it has assumed in the past. Thus, the culture of education and the culture of literature are meeting.

This clash of culture, and the private versus public nature of the debate on sociopolitical criticism, calls to my mind the history of my particular culture, the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. Centuries ago, when the Christian missionaries began trying to eradicate Pueblo religion, they forbade its practice. Rather than cease to exist, it went underground; it became a private, not public, act. Eventually, the Christian church understood they could not eradicate its existence. Pueblo religion resurfaced and exists today as an interesting combination of Catholicism and Pueblo spirituality. Taking it underground, in the long run, served to ensure its existence and place.

In this survey, it is clear that librarians want sociopolitical criticism in addition to literary criticism. However, they seem to fear they will be attacked for publicly stating that position, and so are electing to use it *quietly* and *privately* in their purchasing decisions. I suspect this decision, will in the long run, lead to a point at which a compromise will be

reached—one that allows both sociopolitical and literary criticism to exist.

Final thoughts

I have wondered about Roger's concern about sociopolitical criticism. I find it difficult to review a book as though it exists in a vacuum, isolated from the social realities of the United States, because *books do not exist in a vacuum*. As Taxel notes, literature and the study of literature is "best understood in the context of historical trends and developments in American society" (417). It seems that this ideology that suggests books be reviewed only on literary criteria does not acknowledge the reality that books touch people. This ideology assumes itself to be "apolitical" and therefore "literary." But isn't an apolitical review—by default—a Eurocentric review? Isn't the decision to be "apolitical" in fact a political decision? And isn't this, then, an example of institutional racism, in which the institution is the publishing industry who, by adhering to "literary values" is also, in effect, shutting the door on issues that involve cultural and ethnic minorities? And isn't it odd that, in this discussion of censorship and intellectual freedom, my voice is being silenced; I cannot write a review as I choose; I cannot identify a stereotype as such?

It seems we accord a sort of reverence to art and literature. Both can touch our hearts and move us to experience deep emotion. Those emotions emanate from personal connections to the ideas put forth by the artist. We feel because we are human, with humane attributes sprinkled throughout our sense of being. As human beings, we live among people, not in a vacuum. Why should we view our art and literature as though they exist in a vacuum?

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Elders as Teachers of Youth in American Indian Children's Literature

Jim Charles

Youth and old age in American society

In an examination of the history of old age in the United States entitled *Growing Old in America*, David Hackett Fischer describes a transition in American thinking about the elderly. Early on, the aged in America were characterized as being closer to God. During the colonial period “old people received respect without affection, honor without devotion, [and] veneration without love” (224). Through analysis of American literature, Fischer traces the changing response of society to the aged and the process of aging. He suggests that “old age in modern American literature is not the stuff of tragedy. A truly tragic hero must have strength and dignity and purpose. But old age in twentieth-century fiction has been denied all those qualities. When old age appears at all in a literary work, it is apt to be not tragic, but pathetic. The central theme is the weakness and dependence of age” (124-125). He goes on to document what he calls the “separation of the generations” as manifest in age-segregated retirement communities and in patterns of association between young and old and the rise of the “indulgent grandparent, who showers upon the third generation presents which were denied to the second, smiles benevolently upon infractions of the strictest rules, and astonishes the righteous parent with an invincible determination to spoil the grandchild at every chance” (155). In a cross-cultural study of indulgent grandparents, Dorian Apple concludes that “indulgent grandparents are associated with soci-

eties . . . where grandparents are disassociated from authority” (in Fischer 156). Elsewhere this is referred to as “the hands off” provision of a new social contract wherein “grandparents have neither the right nor the obligation to take an active part in the socialization of grandchildren” (Baranowski 576). It is not surprising to me, then, to see children sticking their tongues out at their grandparents who refuse to give in and make an impulse purchase in the checkout line at ToysRUs, or to see children cold-cocking their grandparents in the toy section at WalMart.

On the other hand, changes in biological and sociological factors such as increased life expectancy and changes in living patterns create opportunities for young and old to enter into potentially meaningful relationships, what Albert and Cattell call “intergenerational transactions.” According to these researchers, “grandparent-hood has emerged as a lengthy component of the lifecourse, more distinct from parenthood than ever before. . . . Aging men and women have increased opportunity to observe their grandchildren across the lifespan. . . . Increased longevity means greater opportunity for contact, greater opportunity for long-term bonds that evolve over time. [Due to declining fertility rates], individuals have a longer time to invest themselves in relatively small groups of kin” (109). On a collision course, the phenomena of increased contact between the young and old and the concomitant decrease in respect for aging and the aged on the part of youth do not bode well for productive intergenerational relationships.

In the paper that follows, I would like to focus, through the “lens” of the grandparent and grandchild in literature, on warm, caring, respect-based relationships between children and adults. Extending this a bit, by filtering this relationship through a second lens, that of American Indian culture, where positive relationships between aged and young exist, teachers may have a model to share with students for strengthening connections between the generations. This thesis may not be so far-fetched: having children read and respond to books that depict respectful relationships between the young and old will help to improve strained and weakened connections between the generations.

Youth and old age in American Indian cultures

The view of old age and youth presented to this point differs greatly from relationships between young and old depicted in two recent works by American Indian authors. Before describing and analyzing these literary works, some understanding of American Indian attitudes toward the elderly is in order. First, it is important to note that, given the diversity of

cultures among American Indians, there is no single “American Indian attitude” toward the elderly. Any such generalization is dangerous and leads invariably to the reinforcement and perpetuation of two stereotypes—the generic Indian (all Indian communities share the same singular worldview) and the noble savage (all Indian behavior is “native” and uncorrupted, therefore it is “right”).

An examination of tribal as well as anthropological literature provides some idea of the range of responses to the elderly among the various American Indian tribes. According to Spencer and Jennings, for the Eskimo “the ideal was for older people to settle down with their families, frequently becoming the custodians and teachers of grandchildren” (90), while among the Hupa of northern California “persons of advanced years were well treated but did not receive exaggerated respect because of their longevity . . . Their wants were taken care of by relatives . . . They often tended children while their parents were busy elsewhere” (212). Pomo elders “were respected and humanely treated. They received food and care from their kinsmen, often becoming part of the household of a son or daughter” (225). Opler in describing the relationship between Chiricahua Apache elders and their grandchildren and great-grandchildren points out that “maternal grandparents concern themselves in countless ways the child’s development. They are constantly consulted by their daughter on problems of child-rearing. They are present at ceremonies held for the baby and contribute whatever is needed to these occasions. It is often one of these grandparents who acts as the cradle-maker and shaman of the cradle ceremony. They may suggest a first name for their grandchild. Their home is always open to him, and it is not unusual for him to sleep there” (63). Grandfathers teach their grandsons skills in arrow and rope-making, while grandmothers teach their granddaughters cooking, sewing and basketry techniques (64).

Elders in many American Indian communities are respected for their storytelling ability. Stories among American Indians are not told solely for entertainment. Elder storytellers convey codes of moral behavior, historical information, and family heritage to youth. In his work *The Crow Indians*, Lowie describes the storytelling prowess of Yellow-brow: “Nowadays Yellow-brow, approximately 70 years of age, enjoys a well-merited reputation as a story-teller; young folks invite him to a collation of wild-cherry pudding and make him recount part of his repertory . . . Children liked to hear stories and would ask their elders to tell them, and in this way Yellow-brow acquired his stock—mainly from his father” (107). Opler states that Apache “maternal grandparents . . . function to a considerable

degree as teachers, for a good deal of instruction for the young comes obliquely through stories” (64).

On the basis of my personal involvement in a Ponca family, I can attest to Ponca children’s attitudes toward their grandparents and other elderly relatives. Generally, these children treat elders with great respect. They are taught to do so. They listen attentively to their grandparents when stories about “the Indian way” are told. Young Poncas rely on elders for important cultural information. Among the Poncas, for example, knowledge of tribal songs and song protocol (when to sing particular types of songs, for example) is critical, and the role of elders in the transmission of this knowledge is acknowledged readily. In addition to traditional stories told for didactic and entertainment purposes, historical sketches of famous Ponca leaders, warriors and dancers, unwritten in history books, are passed on to the young by elders. Spirituality is connected to old age. Ponca elders are asked to pray for the sick of the tribe, for the protection of tribal members who join the armed services, to pray grace before meals as well as on numerous other important occasions. There is an acknowledgement that because a person has lived a long life, that individual’s life has been blessed by *Wakonda* (God).

While one must be cautioned against over-generalization, the views of old age presented so far contrast markedly. In the larger American culture the “cult of youth” pervades with its disdain for the elderly and the aging process, while as Thompson and Joseph (1965) explain, “there is no old age retirement . . . [among the] Hopi” (64). According to Strange and Teitelbaum “youth emphasis may not be characteristic of many subcultures, such as Native Americans . . . [which] emphasize ethnic identity [and highly value] the aged persons who exemplify and have knowledge about that identity” (2).

Two examples from American Indian children’s literature

The theme of youth and old age is portrayed effectively with warmth, affection, realism and cultural integrity in two recent works, one each by a mother and her son. Natachee Scott Momaday’s *Owl in the Cedar Tree* and N. Scott Momaday’s *Circle of Wonder* underscore the benefits to youth of entering into meaningful relationships with elders. Further, these works suggest that young people have a great deal to learn about life from elders, lessons that lead to the development of better adjusted personalities and better integrated senses of identity.

Owl in the Cedar Tree is the story of Haske, a young Navajo boy, who must reconcile two conflicting forces exerted on him—the alluring,

modern ways of the non-Indian and the traditions of his own people. Haske's parents are characterized as having

attended a government boarding school when they were young and had lived away from their people. They had learned that people must change with the changing times. They knew much of their way of life was good, and they were proud of being Navajo. But they would not hold to the old superstitions. (20)

They represent contemporary American Indians, educated in the white man's science, art, and lifeways. Haske's parents are skeptical of many of the traditional beliefs of the Navajo. While they are accurate depictions of a significant segment of the American Indian population, to a degree they serve as foils to Old Grandfather who is grounded absolutely in the traditional ways of the Navajo. These ways are equally meaningful to Haske. Early in the story, as dawn breaks, Haske participates in the traditional Navajo rituals of greeting the dawn and the sun at the start of a new day.

Very softly, speaking only to the Dawn Woman and within himself,
[Haske sings],
Dawn Woman, beautiful, beautiful
You come to me, you come to me,
Across the desert
Over the mountains
Weaving a blanket of light. (12)

Afterwards, he sings the Sunrise Song.

One of the most touching aspects of the book is the loving relationship of Haske and "Old Grandfather" (his great grandfather). Old Grandfather embodies the tradition of the Navajo people. In the novel, he intrigues Haske from their first meeting. As shown through their actions, their relationship is built upon respect. Haske helps Old Grandfather, who is blind and very frail, find a comfortable place to sit. He aids the old man as they walk together. Knowing his great grandfather's sweet tooth, Haske always has a piece of candy ready to give him. There is warmth between them. On one occasion, they share a lunch of cold fry bread, muyyon and water. Just as Haske wishes, Old Grandfather, as is his way, tells a story of how he and other Navajos repulsed an attack by Kiowas very near where he and the boy are seated. Their presence near the very spot where the attack occurred together with the old man's vivid telling make this a living

history lesson for Haske. While the graphic events described by Old Grandfather disturb Haske, he respectfully tells the old man, "You were a brave warrior. Our people defended themselves well" (22).

Old Grandfather leads Haske down a spiritual path that results in the child's emotional growth. As he witnesses the restoration of Old Grandfather's health through the traditional Navajo process known as a sing, Haske resolves to become a healer and a sandpainter. There is evidence of real growth in Haske as he realizes "It is good. It is beautiful. I am in my mother's hogan, and there is no world outside. There is no day or night or yesterday or tomorrow. It is all here and now," and then he "close[s] his eyes and sway[s] with the rhythm about him" (49).

Having chosen Old Grandfather's path of Navajo traditions and spirituality, Haske must next cope with the old man's death. Because of the close relationship that has developed between them, Old Grandfather is able, through example, to instruct Haske on death and dying. Escorting Old Grandfather to a comfortable spot in the foothills and helping him to lie down, Haske listens as the old man sings a death song. In this moment of intense sadness for Haske, he demonstrates emotional growth and maturity. From Old Grandfather he learns about death, death with dignity on one's own terms, and the spiritual strength required in death. Further, Haske realizes that he can use his talent as a painter to pay tribute to his great grandfather and maintain ties to the traditional Navajo way of life. He says, "Now I can keep the old ways which Old Grandfather loved so much by painting all the things he told me about. They will never change" (106).

Circle of Wonder by Pulitzer Prize winning novelist N. Scott Momaday (Natachee's son) is another story of youth and old age. It is beautifully written in poetic language, complemented by the author's vivid water-color illustrations. The story speaks of contemporary American Indian culture, a culture that is at once both traditional and adaptive. Traditional Jemez Pueblo people participate in the Roman Catholic Mass and celebrate the birth of the Christ child. In this there is no contradiction; there is cultural change through adaptation.

The story's protagonist is Tolo, a Jemez Pueblo Indian, who is mute. Like many Indian children, Tolo is raised in the presence and under the influence of his grandparents. He lives during three seasons of the year with his parents and during the summer months with his grandfather. "Tolo loved above all to be with his grandfather, for the old man was good to him and told him wonderful stories" (7). He is greatly saddened by the death of his grandfather. "When Tolo was still a child his grandfather

died, and the boy no longer went to the meadow” (7).

The American Southwest, specifically Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico, at Christmas time is the physical and temporal setting of the story. As in *Owl in the Cedar Tree*, the young protagonist copes with and learns from the death of his grandfather. In his dreams Tolo revisits the places of natural wonder, the sounds and silences, the stories he and his grandfather shared together in the foothills of the mountains near his home.

While at Midnight Mass on Christmas eve in the pueblo’s mission chapel, Tolo grows sleepy and begins to think of his grandfather. He envisions his grandfather draped in a blanket in the front of the church near the Nativity. Again, after mass, he sees his grandfather ahead of him in the village procession. He follows the old man to their special spot in the foothills of the mountains where he finds a bonfire burning. An elk, wolf, and an eagle appear to him in succession and of each he asks, “Will you share with me the real gift of this fire?” The story concludes with Tolo’s realization that he, his family, his grandfather, the Christ child, the animals, the mountains and valley are all interrelated in a harmonious circle of life. At this realization he is no longer

poor and mute. His spirit wheeled above the great meadow and the mountains, his loneliness was borne with wild strength of a great elk, and he sang of his whole being with a voice that carried like the cry of a wolf. (40)

Youth, old age, and identity development

According to psychologists Erik Erikson and James Marcia, the development of identity—an integrated view of the self—“is the most important developmental task facing the young person. Accordingly, the primary crisis facing the adolescent is the conflict between accepting, choosing, or discovering an identity and the diffusion of the adolescent’s energies resulting from conflict and doubt about choice of identities” (in LeFrancois 625). Baranowski posits four ways in which strong relationships with elders can positively affect the identity development of young people: 1) Grandparents restore stability to adolescents’ lives through establishing a sense of continuity, linking one generation to the next by sharing knowledge of the family’s heritage; 2) Young people confide in elders they trust, such as grandparents; 3) Grandparents help adolescents to understand the actions of their parents; and 4) Elders explain the aging process and aid in the young person’s understanding and acceptance of both the aging process and the aged individual (580-582).

The two works examined in the present paper demonstrate the positive impact of such warm and caring relationships between elders and youth. Both Haske's and Tolo's lives are enriched beyond measure through the love they receive from and give to a grandparent. The identity development and emotional maturity of each was positively affected through a meaningful relationship with an elder. Elders in these stories convey to children important lessons about life, about death as part of life, about traditions, heritage, and family. These important lessons are essential to a child's healthy development, and as the stories demonstrate, elders are the best teachers of these lessons. In reciprocity, children lend purpose, joy, and responsibility to the lives of elders.

By integrating into the English Language Arts curriculum stories such as *Owl in the Cedar Tree* and *Circle of Wonder*, works which depict young and old people connected to one another in meaningful relationships, teachers enrich the lives of their students, inspiring them to talk with and learn from elders, leading them toward personal growth and maturity. Even those students who do not or cannot have a meaningful relationship with an elder can experience vicariously through stories the warmth and worth of such relationships.

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Calls for Submissions

Native American Literature Symposium

Puerta Vallarta, Mexico
November 29 - December 3, 2000

Papers and panels are welcome on any aspect of Native American Literature. Topics to be considered include tribal sovereignty, narrative strategies, cultural mediations, interdisciplinary arts, literature and history, cultural contexts, and individual authors. We also welcome panel discussions on such things as pedagogical methods, individual texts, authors, and film.

Deadline: August 1, 2000

All queries concerning the content of proposals, panel discussion topics, authors, texts, theoretical approaches, and the actual program itself should be sent to:

Dr. P. Jane Hafen, Program Director
Native American Literary Studies
English Department
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV 89154-5011
(702) 895-3508
jhafen@cmail.nevada.edu

All proposals, registration forms, and checks should be sent to:

Dr. Gloria L. Cronin, Conference Director
3134 JKHB English Department
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602

15th Annual California Indian Conference

Chaffey College, Rancho Cucamonga
October 14 -15, 2000

The California Indian Conference is an annual gathering for the exchange of views and information among academics, American Indians, students, and other community members. Any topic reflecting humanistic, scientific, artistic, or social concern with California Indian peoples and their cultural heritage is welcome. Past topics have included literatures, storytelling, poetry, education, basketry, linguistics, anthropology, archeology, law, repatriation, history, casinos, Hollywood, tribal recognition, song and dance, and social and political issues.

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California Indian Conference
Registration or Abstract
Professor LaMay
English Department
Chaffey College
5885 Haven Avenue
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First Nations

The American Review of Canadian Studies (ARCS), the journal of the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States (ACSUS), is a refereed multidisciplinary quarterly journal. ARCS is planning a special First Nations issue and invites articles, essays, and book reviews which focus on the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, including Indians, Metis, and Circumpolar Peoples. The essays can address any First Nations subject, including, but not limited to literature, politics, education, arts, law, and culture.

Essays which are cross-border and/or place First Nations experience within the broader context of North American indigenous experience are especially welcome. We also feel that essays exploring contemporary First Nations issues that are prominent in Canadian society and which may be not as well known to the US audience would be of great value to our readers.

Deadline: October 15, 2000.

Submissions (electronic if possible) should be sent to:

Phil Bellfy

262 Bessey Hall

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Michigan State University

East Lansing, MI 48824-1033

bellfyph@msu.edu

Women Special Issue

Co-editors, Ines Hernandez-Avila and Gail Tremblay

Frontiers welcomes submissions of articles, photography, art, essays, poetry, and short fiction that explore issues important to indigenous women, including Native women's creative/critical strategies in relation to the following themes:

- Balancing activism, work, and family, and/or "mothering/sistering as praxis"
- Pedagogy (how to teach indigenous women's issues in the classroom, university, college systems, tribal colleges, and/or K-12)

- Representation of indigenous women in literature, art, or media (photo/art/essay submissions by indigenous women artists are especially welcome)
- Personal essays/autobiography by indigenous women (works that challenge common stereotypes and contribute to complex representations of Native women are encouraged)
- The importance of homeland and how region and culture affect indigenous women's perspectives (works that focus on the Northwest U.S. are particularly welcome).

Deadline: October 1, 2000.

For submission guidelines, see:

<http://www.richmond.edu/faculty/ASAIL/frontiers.html>

Review Essay

Dreams and Vision Quests in Janet Campbell Hale's The Owl's Song

The outpouring of imaginative literature that has formed the intellectual backbone of the Native American Renaissance since the 1960s has prompted scholars from various disciplines to examine a broad spectrum of fictional, poetic, and other literary works. Their increasingly noticeable efforts have progressively illuminated many corners of this complex literary edifice and yielded such manifestations as the quarterly journal *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, bibliographies and other reference works, and an intermittent stream of doctoral dissertations in the United States of America, Canada, and overseas. Within this broad front of scholarly advance, however, the attention paid to individual Native American authors has varied immensely. On one flank, the works of N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, Louise Erdrich, and a small handful of other *littérateurs* have been the subjects of dozens of investigations. On the other—and particularly to the detriment of the analysis of children's and youth literature—many noteworthy authors have been largely absent from the pages of scholarly inquiry, even though their works have appeared under the imprint of reputable publishing houses and, in dozens of instances, received favorable reviews.

One such pioneer whose tent remains pitched in the latter camp is Janet Campbell Hale. The author of three novels, a compilation of autobiographical essays, and award-winning poetry, she lingers in the tenebrous

regions of Native American letters, notwithstanding laudatory reviews and the republication of some of her early works. In the present essay, I take steps towards addressing this unfortunate neglect by examining pivotal themes in Hale's first book, her juvenile novel *The Owl's Song*, which Doubleday published in 1974 and which remains in print more than two decades later. This work, which began to take shape during the late 1960s before the continuing wave of Native American literature reached its crest, merits scholarly attention primarily because of Hale's skillful incorporation of dreams and visions in developing her narrative of the efforts of a teenager from a reservation to cope with Native American urban life, itself a sociologically important but at that time rarely explored subject.

As the few critics who have considered Hale's fiction have repeatedly noted, she has mined her own childhood and adolescent years as a migrant in the Pacific Northwest and from her diggings in that rich lode extracted many carats of poignant experience that give her writing much of its verisimilitude. Those facts of her early life that provide autobiographical elements for *The Owl's Song* can be summarized briefly. By her own recent testimony, Hale was born in southern California in 1946, but before she was a year old her father, Nicholas Campbell, a full-blooded Coeur d'Alene from northern Idaho, and her mother, of mixed Kootenai and Irish-Canadian descent, returned to their home on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation.¹ Beginning when Janet was only a few years old, however, her mother took her in tow as she repeatedly fled her alcoholic and violent husband, and migrated through Washington, Idaho, and Oregon. In the mid-1950s the partially reunited family left the Coeur d'Alene Reservation permanently but continued to wander through those three states, owing to Nicholas Campbell's intermittent work as a carpenter. Hale thus lost contact with most of her already diluted tribal culture and became alienated from both her verbally abusive mother and her much older sisters. Lacking adequate opportunities to develop a secure and consistent social basis, and often suffering discrimination and ostracism because of her ethnic identity, she found temporary solace when peers at a junior high school in Portland, Oregon, accepted her before her family's wandering resumed and brought her back to Idaho.

One leitmotif in Native American literature that plays a leading role in *The Owl's Song* has been the quest for divine aid and revelation through visions to individuals. Although seen as a primarily Plains Indians phenomenon since the pioneering research by the noted anthropologist Ruth Benedict early in the twentieth century,² it is in fact one that members of many tribes in other regions of North America, including the cluster of

Plateau Indians that encompasses Hale's Coeur d'Alene, have practiced as a pivotal element of their religion. A comprehensive summary of Plateau spirituality lies outside the scope of the present study, but the most pertinent elements of it can be delineated briefly, in part because they differed little from overarching themes in Native American religion. Plateau Indians traditionally believed in a great spirit, who transcended spirits of the atmosphere and manifested in such phenomena as thunder and the winds. Beneath these deities was a diverse pantheon of zoomorphic lesser spirits that served as personal guardians. Divine will and power, in other words, tended to be revealed in animals as well as other elements of nature. Like other aspects of Native American culture, religion was thus intimately intertwined with the physical environment in which people lived. Frequently revelations occurred to individuals unsought, although as part of rites of passage, young men were expected to undertake quests for visions and personal guardian spirits. Women were generally not required to undertake these quests.

Obviously written with young readers in mind, Hale's narrative is almost entirely lineal and uncomplicated. Writing from an omniscient narrator point of view, she relates how Billy White Hawk, a fourteen-year-old youth on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation in northern Idaho whose mother succumbed to tuberculosis nine years earlier, leads an isolated life and sees no future in that area following his graduation from elementary school. His father, William White Hawk Sr., commonly known by his middle name Joe, is an essentially benevolent man in his sixties whose life alternates between his sporadic employment and drinking bouts at the Big Bear tavern. Lacking other role models and, apparently, friends, Billy lionizes his older cousin, Tom, who served in the United States Army in Vietnam but returned to the reservation following a dishonorable discharge. Their reunion leads to a shattering of Billy's tranquil if stultifying environment. After Tom regales his fawning cousin with tales of the horrors of war in Southeast Asia, the two youths drive to another town where they collect two young Chicanas, the older of whom Tom has previously dated, and escort them to the house which Tom's parents and sister occupy on the reservation. While Tom and his tractable girlfriend copulate in that modest structure, the sexually unseasoned Billy and the younger girl chat, drink beer, and engage in increasingly passionate foreplay outdoors. Billy's hopes of testing his virility by having intercourse with his pubescent partner end abruptly when the house burns down, the victim of Tom's smoking in bed. Tom's sister then appears on horseback and violently upbraids Tom as a ne'er-do-well whose irresponsible behavior has

destroyed the impoverished family's only major possession, a charge he cannot deny. Thoroughly humiliated, and with Billy and their two female companions accompanying him, he drives his parents' car aimlessly for hours through the wilderness before stopping at a remote spot on a mountain road. To the horror of his three passengers, and over their surprisingly mild protests, Tom shoots himself with a .22 caliber rifle and quickly dies. This suicide scene, riddled with implausibilities, is the only sensationalized episode in *The Owl's Song*.

The senseless demise of his only hero leaves Billy even more bereft of any sense of purpose or direction in his life. He feels a compulsion to leave the reservation. His father facilitates this by requesting his much older daughter by a previous marriage, Alice Fay, who has settled in a city on the Pacific coast, to accommodate Billy while he continues his education. She accedes to this plea by sending her half-brother a letter inviting him to leave what she condescendingly calls "that godforsaken piece of land" and thereby avoid the path of self-destruction that "is the way of so many reservation boys" by joining her; she underscores her insistence that he obey her and not engage in any delinquent behavior (49).

Before the end of the summer, Billy boards a bus and travels all day to that city, whose description suggests that Hale has Portland, Oregon, in mind. Arriving at its tawdry bus depot, he cannot find Alice Fay's telephone number in the directory until he reexamines her letter to him and discovers belatedly that she has abbreviated her surname from "White Hawk" to "White," the first of many signs of her efforts to assimilate herself after accepting what was still popularly called "relocation," first by participating in a vocational skills program in Los Angeles, then accepting industrial employment in the Pacific Northwest. She collects him in her late model Buick Special in the middle of the night and brings him to her flat above a bar called Arnie's Hideaway, an abode previously inhabited by a prostitute. There Billy wastes away the next few weeks watching television, reading comic books, smoking illegally acquired cigarettes irregularly, and engaging in other unproductive pursuits while waiting for the school year to begin.

The youth's months at Lincoln Junior High School prove to be an equally bootless venture, as he feels culturally and ethnically isolated in that institution with its largely African-American or "Kweauss" majority. He becomes increasingly unhappy, not least when his fellow pupils ridicule his ethnic identity, until a sympathetic art teacher recognizes his talent and encourages him to express his cultural leanings through painting. Relations with the bullying Kweauss pupils continue to deteriorate,

however, and reach their nadir when Billy exchanges punches with one named Curtiss Brown (or “Ibutu” in his self-styled Black Consciousness appellation), arguably an act of self-defense, though one which leads to a stiff reprimand and the threat of expulsion from school. Meanwhile, Alice Fay, whose life consists of little more than working daily, drinking sherry nightly, and watching television, has become increasingly critical of her half-brother and threatens to send him away to a Bureau of Indian Affairs school to receive more discipline and acquire habits of personal hygiene. Billy eventually finds an outlet in artistic expression and wins the favor of his instructor, who suggests that his work merits inclusion in a forthcoming exhibition.

Almost immediately, the generally acquiescent Billy has finally summoned the strength to defend his ethnic tradition by delivering an anti-imperialist speech at a school talent show. Rather than telling jokes or imitating Sitting Bull, as other pupils encourage him to do, Billy gives an acerbic summary of American history from a Native American viewpoint, beginning with the arrival of “some funny-looking, white-skinned people” whom the indigenes initially welcome and assist but who respond by dispossessing all the land in the eastern part of the country. Not sparing his tormenters at Lincoln Junior High School, Billy declares that when the Native Americans resisted servitude, the Euroamerican “frog bellies brought over a bunch of black skins to be their slaves.” Upon gaining their freedom, however, the latter “were just as bad, if not worse, than their white captors.” Eventually the Native Americans formed an “intertribal coalition” to facilitate their struggle against “these uppity blacks and uppity whites.” In council, leaders discuss possibilities for dealing with them, including enslavement or consignment “to either segregated or integrated concentration camps.” They implement their final solution of taking both blacks and whites by surprise and driving them back into the Atlantic Ocean. Billy concludes his tirade with a précis of his vision of edenic America: “And so, rid of the blacks and whites, the country went back to being much like it was before, open and wild, quiet. Nobody was ever going to be let in again because they couldn’t cut it at home” (122-125).

Fearing disciplinary action, Billy wanders through the city aimlessly before visiting his sensitive art teacher at his private residence and studio in a warehouse loft. This Mr. Barrows listens sympathetically to his explanation of his speech but refuses to make an unqualified promise of support. The administration of the school summons Alice Fay, who first slaps her half-brother before imploring him without success to surrender his

ethnic identity and comply with the wishes of the educational authorities. She renews her plea that he transfer to a BIA school where he will acquire culture in the form of opera, concerts, and ballet. Billy's counselor at Lincoln Junior High School refuses to hear his side of the matter and, with the assent of Barrows, disciplines him by barring him from competing in a forthcoming art exhibition. "You hurt a lot of kids' feelings in there," this official informs Billy in one of the many ironies that elucidate this youth's emotional reactions in *The Owl's Song*. "You can't go around hurting people's feelings. I won't allow it" (137). This proves to be the last straw for Billy who, after learning that Alice Fay has found a place for him at a BIA school and enduring a period of hospitalization and convalescence from an unspecified illness, decides to leave the city and return to the reservation in Idaho. His final act in her apartment is stealing a bottle of sherry from her cupboard to present to friendly winos whose acquaintance he has made in that derelict neighborhood.

In the final nine pages of *The Owl's Song* Billy is back on his reservation, living with his father, who welcomes him home. The elder White Hawk has been ill but continues to drink immoderately. He transfers more responsibility to his son, including allowing him to drive his pickup truck, notwithstanding Billy's lack of a driver's license. The two work together briefly in the woods; Billy also reacquaints himself with his boyhood surroundings by spending time in the nearby town. Their firm relationship ends only when the father succumbs to a heart attack after an excessively strenuous session of chopping firewood. Billy accepts his father's passing with equanimity, confident now that he can survive as a Native American man in a fitting habitat.

Hale's groundbreaking exploration of race relations, especially between urbanized Native Americans and African Americans, and her contrasting of two siblings who respond so differently to their immersion in ethnically plural city life, would in themselves make *The Owl's Song* a noteworthy early addition to Native American adolescent literature. It is, after all, a valuable commentary on the tribulations of a Plateau Indian to adjust to multicultural life in a Pacific coast city by one who was intimately familiar with that subject. Yet this book is more than unique social commentary. Hale's use of dreams and visions, especially those of Billy White Hawk and his father, adds a vital element of depth to her narrative, one with both narratorial and spiritual dimensions. This mythic component also anchors Hale's first novel culturally in the Native American Renaissance, in which indigenous spirituality has provided both substance and structure to fictional and other works that otherwise would not differ

greatly from Euroamerican literature. It also bears *The Owl's Song* to a greater altitude of literary artistry by lending it an element of continuity and imaginativeness as Hale interweaves the social message with a crescendo of mythic symbolism.

This crucial factor hinges on the spiritual dialectic between Billy White Hawk and his father. These two characters obviously represent two generations of Native Americans and, on the surface, varying degrees of assimilation in predominantly Euroamerican culture. Immediately below the surface, however, Hale creates a paradox in their spiritual paths. In brief, the elder White Hawk has experienced a vision through a quest quite typical of Plains and Plateau Indians but eventually questions the validity of his vision. His son seeks corresponding spiritual enlightenment and only belatedly discovers that he has received it. Their interlocking comprehensions of their visions form much of the plot of *The Owl's Song*, arguably to at least as great an extent as Billy White Hawk's encounter with cultural and ethnic pluralism in a Pacific coast city.

The younger White Hawk, who is not identified as a Native American in the Prologue, where he appears as a six-year-old boy, comes into initial contact with the spiritual dimensions of his cultural legacy in that section of the narrative. He and his cousin Tom lie sleeping in his home while the elder White Hawk is visiting his tubercular wife in a sanitarium. Billy dreams that he assumes the form of a bird and soars to the sun, where he hears the unintelligible chanting of old men before returning to earth. The two boys then hear an unidentified, haunting sound that Tom, who nowhere in this work evinces any awareness of Native American spirituality, dismisses as "just a poor old hooty owl [that] can't find his way home" (3). These seemingly unrelated phenomena begin to take on mythic meaning in Chapter One, when Billy, then fourteen, converses with the centenarian Waluwetsu, a sagacious member of the tribe who serves as a conduit through whom tribal cultural memory is transmitted. This indigenous savant informs the youth of the existence of manitous, i.e., spirits who could manifest themselves in natural phenomena.³ Waluwetsu also prophesies the demise of the people of that reservation. "There is little left of what once was," he laments. "And we will be no more. The time is coming when the owl's song will be for our race" (7).

In the second chapter Hale introduces Joe White Hawk's adolescent vision and the manhood song he acquired in it, though in a possibly ironic mode that associates the song with his drunkenness. The elder White Hawk returns intoxicated from the Big Bear intoning the chant, which triggers his son's memory of being told that his father had sung it in the

trenches of France during the First World War and thereby had supposedly gained protection from German shelling while comrades-in-arms were falling around him (12-13). In a flashback incorporating a childhood recollection, Billy recalls how Joe, who according to Waluwetsu was one of the last members of the tribe to seek a vision (41), had related how, upon returning home from an Indian school in Oklahoma to which he had been sent as an adolescent and where he had been forced to learn English and otherwise adopt Euroamerican culture, he had asked his father, the tribe's last shaman, for advice about how to contact the manitous. Presumably Joe had felt a need for spiritual reinforcement to carry him through another year at school. Heeding his father's counsel, he maintained a four-day vigil without sleep or nourishment in the hills. At last Joe had experienced what appeared to be a star descending to the earth; his spirit had responded by separating from his body and merging temporarily with the stellar white light. Through nonverbal conversation, he had communicated with the manitous during this experience. "I understood perfectly all the truth concerning life and death and spirits and the ways and reasons for being," he explains to his son. "My name, they said Sa-húlt-sum; He-Who-Searches." As night yielded to dawn, his spirit had returned to his body and the light faded. In a wind he had heard his manhood song (42-43).

Joe had informed Billy that his late Christian wife had never accepted the authenticity of this vision. When Billy considers undertaking a vision quest after Tom's suicide, he again queries his father about the details of his own. By then, however, the elder White Hawk's perception of his childhood vision has begun to succumb to his acculturation. Rather than confirming his previous account, he relates stories of UFO sightings about which he has read in a detective magazine. "All these accounts, so strange, I thought, all so similar to each other and to my own experience. I've been wondering lately about it. Wouldn't that be something, if I saw an actual flying saucer?" he asks Billy. "Might of been from Mars or somewhere" (45-46). His disillusioned son nearly begins to weep.

Billy does not totally abandon his commitment to ostensibly supernatural revelation, however. In an autoscopic dream that night he obeys a voice calling him to walk to a nearby river. On the other side a white-haired old man clad in buckskin, whom he recognizes as Waluwetsu, motions to him to cross the river. Fearing its depth and the strength of its current, Billy replies that he cannot. Waluwetsu thus turns away. Billy then wakes up and with difficulty realizes that his troubling experience was merely a dream (46-47). The significance of its unobtrusive symbolism

appears to be Billy's realization at that stage that he has not yet acquired the strength from his cultural tradition to carry him safely through the maelstrom of life.

Later that summer—his last before leaving the reservation—Billy heeds Waluwetsu's advice to seek a vision in which the manitous would tell him what his man's name would be. For three weeks that August he ascends the hills and waits by the river near his home but abandons his quest when no spirits manifest themselves to him, feeling "foolish that he'd been looking for Manitous, that he'd taken Waluwetsu's words seriously" (17). He thus crosses the social bridge to the urban scene unarmed with those spiritual weapons of manhood. This proves crucial as he faces the challenges of living with his domineering half-sister and attempts to ward off the verbal and physical blows of African Americans at school, while simultaneously enduring discrimination and cultural insensitivity on the part of its faculty and administration.

After enrolling in the urban junior high school, the constantly isolated Billy understands that he not only suffers ostracism from his peers there but also that he is cut off from his own ethnic tradition. When members of the African American majority dance during the lunch break, he envies their solidarity and imagines that their gyrations are "almost a tribal sort of dancing" (101). His thoughts turn to experiences of seeing members of other tribes perform their dances at pow-wows at Wellpinit, Toppenish, and Nespelem; by contrast, the Coeur d'Alene "had long since forgotten theirs" (101). Billy's envy of the blacks' seeming unity even prompts him to adopt elements of their slang (e.g., "fah out," "shee-it"), although this fails to bring him closer to them. Instead, his longing for reattachment to his roots finds its primary expression in his art, as he paints landscapes of his reservation and a detailed picture of elderly male celebration singers around a drum at a festive nocturnal occasion illuminated by firelight (109-110, 115).

Not until being reprimanded for his fight with Curtiss Brown and facing stiffer disciplinary action in the wake of his anti-imperialist speech does Billy's seed of cultural rebirth begin to germinate. Having found some solace in walking along the beach, he returns to that scene of tranquility one evening to ponder his predicament. Watching the recurrent waves, the troubled youth feels that "the ocean was something you knew was inside you all along. You watched the waves. You thought of the ocean. You *internalized* the ocean. It all had a calming effect" (132). The contours of the surface also strike a chord of memory within him:

He remembered back home, the crops of grain, golden wheat, pale yellow barley, growing tall and plentiful upon the rolling hills. When summer winds came and shook the stalks you could see the ripples and waves over the hills, an ocean that did not reach as far as this one of water and salt but it was the same, it went on as far as the eye could see, where sky and sea, or sky and earth, met. (132)

The artistically inclined but emotionally buffeted Billy senses both transience and permanence in the pattern of the waves. “Old, old, everlasting, always-there ocean. Always changing, shifting, old things coming apart and new things forming, old life dying and new come into being” (133). Suddenly an element of his cultural memory enters the watery scene. While staring at one spot on the surface where the waves repeatedly rise and fall in tandem, he sees what appears to be “a big ocean-going fishing canoe heading out toward the open sea, the white foam in a row like the foam men might make pushing oars through the water and lifting them” (133). Billy is momentarily entranced by this scene before dismissing it as an optical illusion.

Billy does not at this time recognize the significance of this visual encounter. Indeed, its meaning does not occur to him until after he returns to the reservation. Before leaving the city, however, he experiences further memories of his childhood environment, visions and nightmares that fortify his resistance the loss of his remnant of cultural identity. In one recurring bad dream, for example, Billy sees a whirlwind sweep through a room in which he is sleeping and hurl him against its walls. Helpless against its force, he believes that if he could only pass through the door he would escape the clutches of the whirlwind. The battered youth is unable to reach the door (141). In an equally lucid symbolic incident, Billy suffers aphasia at school and wanders aimlessly and in fear through the building, not knowing where he should go next. His memory returns before the end of the school day, but he feels compelled to leave without attending his two final hours of instruction. At Alice Fay’s apartment later that afternoon, “he remembered how awful it had been to be a person with no past, no identity” (143). This trauma, in other words, is an intensified microcosm of his plight as an urbanized Native American detached from his ethnic roots. Finally, Billy is hospitalized while suffering an unidentified disease that causes dizziness and delirium. He believes that his death is imminent but does not fear it. Lying in a hospital bed, he sees himself lying in a birchbark canoe that floats down a river on his home reservation. As this craft moves downstream, Billy hears the hooting of an owl and

interprets it as manitous foretelling him of a impending death. At the same time, he hears people on the shore warning him that the canoe is approaching a waterfall. The prospect of his imminent demise terrifies him. Billy then senses the spiritual presence of Joe White Hawk and believes that the song of the owl prophesying death applies not to himself but to his father. This conviction leads him to overcome his reluctance to confront the emotionally burdened life on the reservation and return home, not knowing whether he is already an orphan (116-147).

Upon reaching his home, Billy learns that his aging father has in fact been seriously ill in his absence but subsequently recovered. His curiosity apparently deepened by his dreams and encounters with the manitous, he presses his father for more information about his manhood vision. To his great disappointment, the mentally enervated elder White Hawk concedes that his memory has faded to the point that he recalls very little about that adolescent experience (154). Very shortly thereafter Joe suffers his heart attack.

In the brief final chapter, Billy, still only fifteen years old and lacking any visible means of worldly support but for precisely that reason compelled to fend for himself, belatedly understands that he, too, has experienced a manhood vision. He remembers seeing an image of a canoe pressing ahead through foam that rises and falls with the motion of the paddlers. Hale does not explicate the vision in detail but merely declares that at this point the orphaned youth realizes that "Billy White Hawk was his man's name. He needed no other." He recalls and accepts without lament Waluwetsu's message that the traditional world of the Coeur d'Alene had largely passed from history. He also understands that he has no future on the reservation, but he knows that he now can leave it and live confidently elsewhere, fortified with his vision that his roots would always be firmly anchored in its soil. Billy's spiritual awakening concludes with a song he hears emanating from an invisible source, one that he realizes "came from deep within his being." This comprehension of his own proud heritage with its roots in both nature and the supernatural allows him to live in hope. The final paragraph of *The Owl's Song* succinctly captures Billy's strength: "It was all right, now. It was all right. Manitous, spirits of earth, wind, rain, sun. Father and grandfather and unknown ancestors. Benewah country and Lapwai and Clearwater, oceans, deserts, cities, it was all the same, now. It was all right" (160).

Hale's skillful marshaling of dreams and visions in *The Owl's Song* has manifold significance to the educational value of this work as well as to the assessment of its place in the history of Native American literature.

Most obviously, her use of these phenomena call to the attention of readers their rôle in the conventional epistemology of many Native Americans. One can reasonably assume that most young readers of this book, regardless of their previous exposure to indigenous spirituality, will gain some basic awareness of the tendency of unassimilated or marginally assimilated Native Americans to seek divine revelation and spiritual strength in visions, dreams, and zoomorphic phenomena. The negative side of the coin, of course, is the possibility that readers of *The Owl's Song* will gain from it an exaggerated notion of the persistence of these dimensions of Native American spirituality and mistakenly assume that they remain a hallmark of that segment of the country's ethnic kaleidoscope.

Turning to Native American literary history since the 1960s, the spiritual aspect of Hale's first novel suggests her indebtedness to the groundbreaking endeavors of N. Scott Momaday. His fictional work of 1969, *House Made of Dawn*, for which he received a Pulitzer Prize, is widely regarded as a fountainhead of Native American literature, in that his highly creative embedding of indigenous mythic elements in his narrative prompted many subsequent authors, perhaps most notably Leslie Marmon Silko, to do likewise. By her own testimony, Hale began to write *The Owl's Song* in 1969, while an undergraduate student at the University of California in Berkeley, where Momaday was then teaching.⁴ Certain parallels between the two authors' debut novels are striking. Of greatest relevance to the topic at hand, in *House Made of Dawn* the protagonist is a Native American who returns to his reservation emotionally scarred from participation in the Second World War and lives with an elderly relative, in this case a grandfather, whose spirituality encompasses both Roman Catholic and indigenous traditions. Emotionally scarred by his military experience and addicted to alcohol, he cannot adapt to life on the reservation. After an illicit sexual relationship with a non-Native female, he kills another man and, after serving a prison sentence, relocates in a city on the West Coast, Los Angeles, where he again finds it impossible to mesh with a lifestyle governed by other ethnic groups. He therefore returns to the reservation and eventually receives spiritual healing in the traditions of his ancestors. In *The Owl's Song*, Tom and Billy White Hawk form a successive parallel to this character, with Billy serving as an extension of his cousin after the latter's suicide. The overarching correspondence between the two novels is broken by Billy's relative innocence and his awareness at a much earlier stage of the potential value of gaining a vision similar to that which his father had experienced and his attainment

of one while in a Pacific coast city. Structurally, moreover, Hale's generally linear narrative is much less innovative and non-Native than Momaday's, as indeed one would expect of this woman whose exposure to Native American mythology and other thought patterns was on a much smaller scale than his. This is not to suggest that *The Owl's Song* is merely Momaday Lite. It seems at least arguable that Hale's first work of fiction represents her evidently bifocal Coeur d'Alene and Euroamerican background at least as vividly as *House Made of Dawn* embodies Momaday's more distinctly Southwestern Native American heritage.

Curiously enough, the mythic element is largely absent from Hale's subsequent books, all of which have been for adult readers. In her emphatically autobiographical novel *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture*,⁵ for example, she relates the moral and emotional decline of a Native American woman who moves from her reservation in Idaho to San Francisco, becomes an unwed mother after a tryst with a Euroamerican soldier who dies in Vietnam, marries another Euroamerican who has little respect for her, and eventually becomes a hard-drinking, sexually promiscuous law student at the University of California in Berkeley. Hale retraces much of the same ground in her compilation of autobiographical essays and vignettes, *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter*,⁶ in which she narrates inter alia her alienation from a verbally abusive mother and indeed her family of origin in general, her departure from her reservation and consequently weak comprehension of Coeur d'Alene folkways, years of childhood and adolescent itinerancy in the Pacific Northwest, a series of broken marriages, difficulties in finding gratifying employment, and other tribulations of a poorly adjusted life. A leitmotif in these later works is the virtual absence of any moral or emotional anchoring in either indigenous spirituality or the Christian tradition in which Hale was nurtured as a child but rejected as an adult. Read sequentially against the backdrop of known facts about her personal life, *The Owl's Song* and Hale's other literary works leave one wondering what sort of spiritual path she has followed through her private wilderness.

Frederick Hale

NOTES

¹Janet Campbell Hale, *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter*.

New York: Random House, 1993. xvi-xvii. In her autobiographical data in *Contemporary Authors*, however, Hale insists that she was born on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation in 1946.

²Ruth Benedict, "The Vision in Plains Culture," *American Anthropologist*, 24.1 (January-March 1922): 1-23.

³Strictly speaking, this is linguistically misplaced. The term "manitou" or "manito," meaning a spirit, occurs in the Algonkian family of Native American languages, which includes Ojibwa and Cree in the Great Lakes region. The Coeur d'Alene language belongs to the significantly different and much less widely spoken Salish language family in southwestern Canada and the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America.

⁴Janet Campbell Hale, *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter*. New York: Random House, 1993. xx.

⁵New York: Random House, 1985.

⁶New York: Random House, 1993.

Reviews

“Artistic License” Should Be Revoked If It Involves the Re-writing of History: My Heart is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose by Ann Rinaldi. Scholastic Paperbacks, 1999. ISBN 0590149229. 197 pages.

My Heart is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose, a Sioux Girl, is without doubt one of the worst books concerning Native Americans I have ever read. The very first line sets the precedent for a travesty of a book that covers racism, stereotyping, and inaccurate history. This is fiction posing as truth. Written by a non-Indian and published by Scholastic as part of its “Dear America” series, this book is supposedly the diary of a young American Indian girl who was at Carlisle Indian Boarding School in Pennsylvania in 1880. The truth is not revealed until the last page, where a small disclaimer states that Nannie Little Rose is a fictional character created by author Ann Rinaldi, and the diary is a work of fiction. Of course, this is also overlooked in the media hype; the book is lauded by the marketing and distribution forces behind it. Librarians and educational specialists across the country are ordering it.

The true history of Carlisle is never revealed in the diary. Captain Richard H. Pratt, founder of this first government-run off-reservation Indian boarding school, touted the motto, “Kill the Indian and save the man.” Established in 1879, Carlisle was an educational attempt at separating Indian children from their so-called “savage” parents. Horror stories and the devastating effects of these schools on young Indians abound in almost every tribe. Long hair was cut, traditional clothing stripped away,

native languages and anything connecting an Indian youth to tribal identity was not allowed. Based on a plan of cultural genocide, teaching the youth that every aspect of their heritages was evil and savage, the schools instructed the students in vocational training and academic studies, preparing them to live in the white man's world.

In the author's note, Rinaldi says of the children she fabricated, "I am sure in whatever Happy Hunting Ground they now reside, they will forgive this artistic license, and even smile upon it." I seriously doubt this. What about Indian children today who continue to be humiliated by the "artistic license" of non-Indians writing to "educate" the public about the history of Indian people? Once again, Native American history is distorted due to ignorance. This book is a slam to the non-Indians who have written quality books about Native peoples.

Rinaldi went to the gravesites of Indian children who had died at Carlisle and said the "lyrical names" jumped out at her. "That she (Rinaldi) would take the names of real Native children from gravestones and make up experiences to go with them is the coldest kind of appropriation," states a critical review of the book compiled by nine women, including Naomi Caldwell (Ramapough Mountain), past president of the American Indian Library Association, and Barbara Landis, Carlisle Indian School Research Specialist. (See full review at www.oyate.org.)

Along with the stereotyping and racism, *My Heart is on the Ground* contains many historical inaccuracies. For instance, in the December 13th diary entry, Sitting Bull is stated as being "of the Cheyenne nation." He was Hunkpapa Lakota. In the December 21 entry, American Horse is noted as chief of the Red Cloud Sioux. He was actually a cousin to Red Cloud. There are some who will argue that it is possible that an Indian child could have had the actual experiences at Carlisle that Nannie Little Rose supposedly had. But the overwhelming body of evidence—written and oral—suggests otherwise. Thomas Jefferson Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the time Indian children were being sent to Carlisle, described his procedure for taking the children from their parents: "I would withhold rations and supplies and when every other means was exhausted, I would send a troop of US soldiers."

It is remarkable that Rinaldi would have her readers believe that a ten-year-old who knew no English and nothing of white ways was writing fluently in English and totally assimilated into a foreign culture after ten months at Carlisle. Perhaps Rinaldi thinks the misuse of grammar will be convincing: "I am getting much excited to know I have write something a white person can read." Maybe Rinaldi should consider writing Tarzan or

Tonto's diary.

This book is pure fabrication and does nothing but exemplify racism, stereotyping, and literary abuse of American Indians. I don't recommend it to anyone.

MariJo Moore

***The Birchbark House* by Louise Erdrich. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1999. ISBN 0-7868-0300-2 With illustrations by the author. x + 244 pages.**

The Birchbark House is Louise Erdrich's second book for children. The first, *Grandmother's Pigeon*, was for younger children. It had around thirty large pages, most of those filled with large colored illustrations, and not much text. This new book, designed with an older juvenile audience in mind, is of regular book length with multiple chapters and a larger cast of characters. It has monochromatic illustrations, mostly marginal but a few full-page, all delightfully drawn by Erdrich herself. *The Birchbark House* is the first in what promises to be a continuing series of stories featuring Omakayas, an Ojibwa girl who starts this narrative at age seven and ends it a year later. One gathers that later volumes in the series will show her growing a bit older, and will constitute something that might be called an Ojibwa *Little House on the Prairie* series.

"This book and those that will follow," Erdrich says in her "Thanks and Acknowledgments," "are an attempt to retrace my own family's history." Having discovered that some of her ancestors lived on Madeline Island "during the time in which this book is set," Erdrich builds on family and tribal traditions, histories, and her own imagination in creating the story of Little Frog, or Omakayas (to be pronounced, Erdrich tells us, "Oh-MAH- kay-ahs. Dear Reader, when you speak this name out loud you will be honoring the life of an Ojibwa girl who lived long ago"). Omakayas lives with her mother, her part-French trapper-father, her grandmother, her older sister, and her two younger brothers. The setting is Madeline Island (Moningwanaykaning in Ojibwa, which means Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker) in what is now western Lake Superior.

Omakayas is a remarkable young girl who takes part in the daily life of her Ojibwa family. Early in life she plays with two baby bears and is even befriended by their mother. As a result of that incident she grows to have an unusual affinity for animals. The bears appear only once more in this

novel, but later a female bear spirit becomes her helper. Her affinity for animals is shown also in her companionship with a wounded crow that she befriends and that becomes her pet. The plot of the novel covers the four seasons, from the joys of summer and fall through the terrors of the winter of 1847, and finally to the renewal of spring.

Much of the story—perhaps too much of it—is taken up with what we might think of as cultural background about Ojibwa life. The story sometimes reads like a how-to manual for Ojibwa domestic activities. We learn, with Omakayas, how to make a birchbark house, how to tan a hide with the brains of the slaughtered animal, how to keep crows out of the corn, how to harvest wild rice from a boat, how to parch corn, smoke fish, and make a food cache, how to make beaver stew, how to chink a log house with mud, how to do beadwork, how to sew “makazins” (footwear made with tanned moose-hide), how to gather maple sap and boil it down to maple sugar, how to plant corn and squash. And so on. This kind of material gives readers a lot of information about the daily life and the living conditions of mid-nineteenth-century Ojibwa Indians, but many young readers will wonder what the *story* is, what adventures Omakayas will have once she learns how to do all these things. They will wonder through the first half of the novel when the danger will come, when she will be tested.

The story does build to Omakayas’s participation in two memorable events in the winter of 1847. The first is the coming of smallpox, the dreaded disease that attacks everyone in her family except her and her grandmother Nokomis, that disfigures her once-lovely older sister, that nearly kills her father, and that does kill her baby brother. The second is the pinching hunger that follows and nearly destroys what is left of the disease-weakened family in that terrible winter. Erdrich’s most powerful writing comes in this “winter” section of the book. It brings home to any reader the precariousness of existence for Ojibwa Indians in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The story closes with a more hopeful section on spring and the rising hopes and spirits of Omakayas. Indeed, in the closing section the spirit of her dead brother seems to speak to Omakayas, telling her, through the song of a sparrow, that he is all right: “I’m in a peaceful place. You can depend on me. I’m always here to help you, my sister” (239).

One of the most interesting features of *The Birchbark House* is the series of three little stories that Omakayas learns from her elders. The first is “Deydey’s Ghost Story,” her father’s tale about his narrow escape from a place where man-eating sisters attack him. The second is “Grandma’s

Story” about Nokomis’s encounter with the spirit of her drowned grandmother. The third is Nokomis’s story about how “Nanabozho and Muskrat Make an Earth.” These stories, set off in italic, attest to the importance of narrative in the lives of early Ojibwa Indians and show interesting connections with the story of Omakayas and her family.

White people, or “chimookomanug,” play only a minor role as actual characters in the story. There is passing reference to the man who trades with the Ojibwa for furs and maple syrup, and Omakayas’s father is himself half French, but the white presence is felt largely in what I might call negative innuendo. Smallpox is clearly identified as a disease brought to the Indians by the white man, for example, and there are several references to the growing pressures by white settlers wanting to move the Ojibwas west and away from their ancestral lands. On the other hand, the white trader seems on the whole to be a fair-minded man, and the Ojibwas seem to understand that there are ways that they can profit from some of the things white people know. The Ojibwa hunters and trappers need or at least want some of the trade goods that the trader makes available to them, apparently at unfair prices, and Omakayas’s older sister comes to see the potential value of going off after the smallpox epidemic to learn to read and write the “tracks” that the white men put on papers.

Although some of her Ojibwa characters see the utility of learning to read, write, and speak English, Erdrich also makes it clear, on almost every page, that the Ojibwa have their own language also. As in her other novels, Erdrich has her characters use many Ojibwa words and phrases. Almost always it is clear from the context what the words mean. For example, when Omakayas’s older sister praises her beadwork, she says, “You are doing very well, neshemay, little sister” (131). For those who may have missed or misread the context, Erdrich gives at the end of the novel an “Author’s Note on the Ojibwa Language,” complete with references to published dictionaries, as well as a four-page “Glossary and Pronunciation Guide of Ojibwa Terms.” There we read that “neshemay” is pronounced “neh-she-may” and means “little sister or little brother” (243). Clearly it is important to Erdrich to let her readers know that the early Ojibwa Indians had a self-contained culture and language before both were changed and in some ways superceded by the culture and language of the white man.

Although *The Birchbark House* is juvenile rather than adult fiction, many adult readers will enjoy the book, and those who know Erdrich’s other fiction will find much that is familiar here. They will see in young Omakayas, who learns how to play chess and who is identified early by

her grandmother as a healer, a younger Fleur Pillager in *Tracks* and even Lipsha in *Love Medicine*. They will recognize in this novel Erdrich's familiar narrative device of structuring the novel to reveal a family secret at the end. For example, like Lipsha in *Love Medicine*, Omakayas discovers that the family she thought was her family had really only adopted her. Omakayas's blood parents, like Fleur's, had died in a terrible epidemic. Their death left her to be found by Old Tallow, the tall woman who casts out her cowardly husband, lives alone, and provides for herself by doing her own hunting. And of course Old Tallow herself has a familiar ring to her as another of Erdrich's strong-willed and independent women (one thinks, again, of Fleur, but also of Margaret in *Tracks*, of Marie and Lulu and Sister Leopolda in *Love Medicine*, and even of Dot and June in *Love Medicine* and *Tales of Burning Love*). The self-styled "old bear hunter" is a bit rough about the edges ("Nobody has ever stayed with Old Tallow. She drives them off. Eyah"), but we have seen bits of her before (235).

And many readers will recognize the now-familiar Erdrich style that borders on overwriting but stops just short. The story closes, for example, with Omakayas smiling happily as "the song of the white-throated sparrow sank again and again through the air like a shining needle, and sewed up her broken heart" (239; compare the closing of *The Antelope Wife*: "We stand on tiptoe, trying to see over the edge, and only catch a glimpse of the next bead on the string, and the woman's hand moving, one day, the next, and the needle flashing over the horizon"). Having come through the terrible winter that taught her death and despair and depression, Omakayas in the springtime grows beyond tragedy and loss. As the story ends a stronger and wiser Omakayas awaits the adventures that will come her way in future novels.

And so do we. We can guess that the next novel in the series will involve further pressure on the Ojibwas to leave their island home, that Omakayas will have a chance to use her considerable skills as a chess player in her dealings with the trader, and that her growing skills as a healer will come into play, perhaps aided by the spirit of her bear helper and her dead brother. And we can hope that tough Old Tallow will be back again to share at least the sidelines of Omakayas's new adventures and challenges.

Peter G. Beidler

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The Ballad of Billy Badass and the Rose of Turkestan by William Sanders. Yandro House, 1999. (Available from Xlibris.) ISBN 0-7388-0309- X (hardcover), 0-7388-0310-3 (paperback). 248 pages.

How does an ordinary guy become a Monster Slayer, even if he is a full-blood American Indian? And what, in our contemporary world, constitutes a monster? William Sanders poses this very serious question in a very funny book. This is traditional Indian humor, where one laughs because the situation is so serious no other approach will work. The monster is equally appropriate; American Indians have been intimately involved with nuclear problems since the Manhattan Project took over Indian land to test the first atomic bombs, and all the later "tests" which contaminated parts of various reservations. More recently, toxic waste dumps have preferentially been located on or near reservations. A number of authors have commented on this in various ways: Leslie Marmon Silko, demonstrating the effect of the "witchery" in *Ceremony*; and Martin Cruz Smith directly in *Stallion Gate* and metaphorically in *Nightwing*, among others. In these books, the atomic blasts and radioactive residue, removed from any wartime need, serve to illustrate the lengths to which white society will go to dominate the world, and the destruction this brings to the Indians.

William Sanders takes a much broader view of the danger in *The Ballad of Billy Badass*. Like the monsters of the old legends, the atomic "arms race" threatens the entire world. That native peoples, in both the US and the USSR, have suffered more from this than any other group—

have been considered expendable—puts some obligation on them to meet the danger face to face when no other group even recognizes its existence. And, as retold in the old legends of almost every tribal group, so great a danger calls for an extraordinary hero—a Monster Slayer.

In some such legends, the Monster Slayer has been destined for such heroic action from his unusual birth, but in others, he is simply an ordinary young person who acts bravely and wisely in a time of crisis. When Billy Badwater recalls the Cherokee story of the boy who kills the *uk'tena* by shooting it with seven arrows, he mentions nothing unusual about the boy, except that he managed to remove the most fearsome danger the tribe ever encountered. Billy has no idea, when he tells the story to Janna Turanova, that he, too, will have to become Monster Slayer. In the course of this story, presented as a combination romance and adventure tale, Sanders also, almost casually, always with a layer of traditional humor, lays out a number of traditional Indian concerns. (As many have remarked, the Indians' ability to laugh at themselves has been a main survival strategy.)

Billy Badwater, usually called Billy Badass, a Cherokee army veteran at loose ends, not only comes through as a very real person, but one who represents the situation of many young Indians who have to engage with the non-Indian culture. The story begins as Billy, trying to recover from his first peyote meeting, finds himself facing a bluejay who looks him over and remarks, "*Siyo, sgilisi, gado haduhne?*" Naturally startled, even through his hangover, Billy finally comes to grips with the idea that his Grandfather Ninkiller, five years dead, has occupied the body of the bird to talk with him. From that point on, his *eduda* shows up at unexpected intervals, guiding him towards an adventure that neither of them clearly foresees.

Billy's army service has exposed him to a number of learning experiences, most of which he has taken full advantage of: he is expert at unarmed combat, and speaks Russian better than he does Cherokee, despite his grandfather's tutoring. When he meets a young Kazakh woman at a powwow in Tahlequah, he first takes her for Native American. Once he ascertains just what kind of native she really is, he greets her politely in Russian, to her amazement. His Russian lessons, however, focused on a vocabulary that doesn't help him talk with an attractive young woman; he can remember the terms for "barbed-wire entanglement" and "heavy mortar," but no small talk. Still, Janna wants to know about the dancing and the costumes, and as they become more deeply interested in each other, he takes her away from the commercial powwow to a Cherokee stomp

dance. Grandfather, now speaking through a large racoon, cheers enthusiastically.

Janna has come to the United States to continue research she has been doing in her own land—documenting genetic damage resulting from years of atomic testing—where even fewer precautions were offered for the native population than were instituted in the United States. For the last part of her stay, she expects to work on a small Paiute reservation in Nevada where genetic damage has become exceptionally prevalent, but where the initial exposure does not seem to explain it. Billy falls deeply in love with Janna, and feels desolated when she leaves. His *eduda* points out that he has a horse of sorts—his old Honda motorcycle, on which he took Janna to the stomp dance. Billy's trip to Nevada makes a saga of its own, complete with intolerant cops and nasty weather. Once he arrives in Las Vegas, he happens to meet another Indian way off his native turf, Mickey Wolf, a Mohawk ex-priest who now runs the Last Church of Naked City. (He's seen so many "first churches" that he figures there needs to be one for those who come in last.) Mickey Wolf has his own problems, many of them left over from service in Vietnam; he recognizes Billy as Indian, and they form a friendship.

To this point, the book reads like a humorous road trip, with the serious problem of radiation damage in the background. Sanders weaves into the health problems of the Paiutes at Blackwater Springs, another, familiar issue: a section of their most useful land was finagled away some years ago, and now houses a "New Age" resort. The opportunistic leader of this growing cult does not believe in the supernatural, but she knows how to make money from people who do, and she puts on a very good show for them. One evening, however, their ritual raises something they neither intended nor wanted—a being from another dimension, attracted (or permitted to come in) by their ceremony—and sustained by the radioactive waste carelessly and illegally dumped here and there on the reservation.

Again, Sanders presents a strongly held native belief wrapped in the fast-paced plot: rituals have great power, and people who don't understand that, and don't know what they're doing, shouldn't perform them. An enormously dangerous being—a Monster even worse than the *uk'tena*—is now loose in the Nevada desert, causing random and terrible damage. This is the danger foreseen by those who sent Grandfather Ninekiller to get Billy Badass on his feet and moving. But the news of strange deaths on the reservation also reaches a number of people who were involved in the illegal dumping of toxic waste years before; many of

these people have become rich and powerful and don't want any investigation of the area, for health or any other reason. Billy and his friends thus meet yet another familiar enemy of the Indian: official interference and denial.

In his author's note, Sanders explains that he has invented the Black-tail Springs Reservation and has altered details of Cherokee ritual tradition, but that the information about the toxic waste dumping, and especially about the nuclear weapons testing in Central Asia and the effects on the population of Kazakhstan, is factually correct. It may take works like this one, metaphorically embodying the monster we have created and tried to pretend was safely buried in the desert, to make people really see the terrible danger we live in. And although, in true *Monster Slayer* style, Billy and his helpers defeat this monstrous threat at great risk to themselves, we are reminded that his solution may not work for the rest of us. One aspect of the monster has been defeated, but toxic and radioactive waste still lurks on Indian land, Mickey Wolf has not solved his personal issues, and Billy and Janna now have to invent the rest of their lives. *The Ballad of Billy Badass and the Rose of Turkestan* is a book full of outrageous yet believable situations, intriguing characters, and serious Indian humor.

Martha Barter

Contributors

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