

THE CASE OF THE INDIAN DETECTIVE:
NATIVE AMERICAN MYSTERY NOVELS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Though antecedents stretch back at least to Judson R. Taylor's *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective: A Tale of Startling Mysteries* (1882), the Indian detective did not captivate the public imagination until the Western lost force as a vehicle for telling stories about Indians. Tony Hillerman and his 1970s competitors created Mysteries that carry over much of the Western's DNA but put the sheriff's badge on an Indian, wresting the Indian as anti-establishment symbol from the 1960s counterculture and enlisting him in service of Law and Order. With its imperative that a tantalizing puzzle resolve into a rational solution, the Mystery genre is well-suited for continuing the centuries-old project of making the Indian legible to non-Indians because it can satisfy the dual impulses of the "Dialectic of Diversity," exoticism and assimilation. Non-Indian readers want Indians to be both different (strange, mystical, more in tune with nature, etc.) and the same (sharing recognizable desires, worldviews, motivations, etc.). The genre that teases with the unknown and even the supernatural, but also most celebrates rationality, justice, and perhaps individual agency, has become the preferred venue in which most Americans encounter fictional Indians.

Hillerman's success has helped produce a subgenre's worth of imitators. Most of these Native sleuths have been invented by non-Native writers, who tend to follow the dictates of the genre closely. Their protagonists may grumble about police bureaucracy, but they apprehend criminals without seriously challenging American jurisprudence and settler state ideological frameworks. The relatively few Indians who have written Mysteries with indigenous protagonists, by contrast, have tended to resist, adapt, and transform the genre, and their novels less often ratify "official" law enforcement. Apparently, they find that conventional Mysteries, with their emphasis on individualism and their reassurance that justice will prevail, do not allow Native American writers to tell the kinds of stories they want about Indians.

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Introduction

Why the Indian Detective?

As a child, I cut my teeth on the Mystery novel. My first big books were the *Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators* series (150 pages and only a couple pictures!). I soon moved on to more mature fare—*Spiderman*, Science Fiction paperbacks—yet that latent fondness for the genre would unexpectedly reemerge when a University of Illinois graduate course first sparked my interest in American Indian Literature, and then I noticed fictional Indian detectives were investigating whodunit.

I cannot recall reading any Native American literature prior to that 1990s course, even as an English major at Bucknell University. I grew up in White Haven, Pennsylvania. The town is named for Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company co-founder Josiah White, but “White Haven” aptly conveys the mostly monochromatic life in my hometown during my childhood, a place where a kid could feel like white people had always been there despite reciting the “sailed the ocean blue” poem on Columbus Day and coloring Pilgrims and Indians for Thanksgiving. Selective amnesia about indigenous people must have been a Northeast Pennsylvania tradition: my mother graduated from nearby Nanticoke High School without ever learning about Nanticoke Indians. Eliding Native presence is one way to foster white people’s sense of belonging on and to the land. Our high school was skimpy on *all* local history, so I did not even think to ask until my twenties why my town existed, but I was curious about the Indian origins of surrounding towns not named after captains of industry, like Shickshinny, Mocanaqua, Wapwallopen, Nesquehoning, Mauch Chunk. Every Northeast Pennsylvanian hears of the 1778 Wyoming Massacre (British soldiers and Iroquois warriors attacked outnumbered Americans and killed 360 of them), but in school we only “learned” about Pocohantas, Pilgrims, Sacajawea, and Custer. I

hope today Northeast Pennsylvania schools equip their graduates with basic local history, especially the indigenous stories that echo in those town names and, perhaps, in the ears of contemporary Native Americans in Pennsylvania, but I came to that graduate course with vague notions about Indians and no familiarity with their literature. It had never occurred to me that I could seek out such literature on my own as I was far too busy with Isaac Asimov and Frank Herbert.

When my early interest in detectives and this new desire to learn about Native American literature coalesced in this project, I only knew that the non-Native Tony Hillerman had great commercial success with his Navajo tribal detective tales, so I wondered where else such characters appeared and if indigenous people had written any. And that is where my plan to meld these two interests ran into a problem: even though some Native writers have produced these fictions, all Indian detective characters before Hillerman and the overwhelming majority since were invented by non-Indians. My topic led to a study not primarily of Native American literature but of works by non-Indians. That choice has, however, opened useful lines of inquiry.

For example, how do these Indian detectives invented by non-Indians relate to other attempts to inhabit the Other, such as the cross-cultural masquerades Eric Lott analyzes in *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993) or the appropriations of Indianness Philip J. Deloria critiques in *Playing Indian* (1999)? Like Lott, Deloria examines not literature but live performances such as the rituals and regalia of white fraternal societies based fancifully on Indian culture. But we should also regard non-Indian writers creating Native detectives as another way to “play Indian,” for doing so will help us better understand the enticements of the Indian Detective novel for those writers and their readers. Just reasoning

demographically, those readers are mostly not Indians, which means with the Indian Detective novel we usually have non-Indians telling other non-Indians what Indians are like.

These novels do not strike me as a form of “redface minstrelsy” because, with their indigenous heroes solving crimes and bringing justice, they try to send positive messages about Indians and lack vicious mockery or even gentler parody. We are sometimes invited to laugh with the Indian detectives but never at them; I have met no bumbling indigenous Inspector Clouseaus in my survey. The most perfunctory efforts at cultural authenticity seem only unintentional caricatures, as tricky as it is to divine writers’ intentions (even or especially when they tell us). By contrast, we might only see the intentional caricature in blackface, but Lott explains that the minstrel show proffered to white people an uneasy mix of ridicule of and appreciation for black culture. Though Indian Detective novels by non-Natives almost always aim for appreciation and not ridicule of Indians, in crossing cultures no one gets a pass for having good intentions. We must interrogate these images of Indians circulated mostly between non-Indians.

We can argue about what counts as positive images, who decides, and what agendas are served by those judgments. That is why, for instance, Michael Ray Fitzgerald puts quotation marks around the last two words of his subtitle in *Native Americans on Network TV: Stereotypes, Myths, and the “Good Indian”* (2013). Fitzgerald shows how Indian television characters uphold and enforce the dominant order rather than resisting it, thus reassuring mainstream viewers that all is well with the American project. And wanting to play Indian does not necessarily come with the urge to learn about Indians. Deloria writes that The Improved Order of Red Men of the mid-1800s “had no interest in querying Indian people about their customs or recruiting them into the society. They desired Indianness, not Indians” (90). When non-Indians

control representations of Indians, critics and scholars have an extra responsibility to read those images critically and even skeptically, consider fully the context of those images' production and consumption, and think about how our own positionality might inflect our evaluations instead of simply applauding popular culture where Indians get to be the good guys or girls.

We may also ask how Indian Detective novels written by Natives or non-Natives contribute to multiculturalism, the imperative to bring greater diversity to human representations in the arts and popular culture. Liberals and progressives generally applaud efforts to make literature more inclusive. Gina MacDonald, Andrew MacDonald, and MaryAnn Sheridan offer their full-throated endorsement of these novels' multiculturalism:

ethnic detectives have provided a sympathetic voice for often ignored populations, have pushed social, political, and sexual agendas, and, in crossroads cultural encounters, have served as guides to cultures new to American readers and as interpreters of cultural difference. They make the alien and suspect familiar by perceiving new experiences through the eyes of the Other. These functions are especially true of the Native American detective subgenre. (5)

MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan inadvertently reveal blind spots in this kind of thinking about multiculturalism. In this formulation, "ethnic" is a quality—racial, hereditary, and/or cultural—that some people have, and some do not. Despite their point about agendas pushed by or on behalf of "often ignored populations," this model of multiculturalism shows who has the power to notice or ignore. It is more about making those ethnic people on the margins legible to those at the center than a free and equal exchange between different peoples. It is more about bringing ethnic Others closer to the center than truly transforming that center. MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan's "American readers" is a tell. The "often ignored populations"

Americans are now reading about, thanks to literature like the Indian Detective novel, become not-Americans in this construction, as do the protagonists of these detective novels. That these characters are American (or Canadian) citizens is part of their palatable message for “American readers.” Many real Natives do not want to be brought into this warm multicultural embrace and validated as Americans, and Indian Detective novels written by non-Indians tend not to push *their* agendas.

Nor do all scholars extol multiculturalism. Jodi Melamed, for instance, does not find such multicultural fiction “sympathetic.” She skewers what she argues is a naïve faith in multiculturalism’s benefits in *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (2011). Melamed maintains that multiculturalism allows us to believe adding diversity to the literary canon constitutes progress against racial injustice when it actually distracts us from ongoing material oppression of people of color: “liberal multiculturalism’s stress on representation and cultural recognition screened off differential power, dematerialized conceptions of race, and marginalized antiracisms that addressed material disparities in racial outcomes” (34). We should join Melamed in interrogating the cultural work performed by these representations of Indians marketed by non-Indians (and even by Indians) instead of simply celebrating their proliferation as evidence of an improving racial climate.

While it has been illuminating to trace the figure of the fictional Indian detective, my investigation contributes more to Cultural Studies and, indeed, Whiteness Studies, than to Native American literary theory and criticism; most of the texts I examine are created by white people for mostly non-Indian readers or television viewers. I consider Indian writers’ forays into the Mystery in the last chapter, both because I move mostly chronologically through this subgenre

Indians have avoided until recent decades and because those writers should get the last word as many of them push back against the conventional whodunit.

I expected this study would begin with Hillerman and the 1970s and was shocked to discover antecedents stretching back at least to Judson R. Taylor's *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective: A Tale of Startling Mysteries* (1882). The popularity of such "dime novels," before the advent of cinema, caused writers to create dozens of detective character types to plug into the Mystery formula and fill the demand for what we now call content, so Phil Scott does not herald a shift in tastes toward detecting Indians. Nor was any such shift on the near horizon; despite a fair number of offerings in the decades between Phil Scott and Joe Leaphorn's arrival in 1970, the Indian detective character never captivated the reading or viewing public until the Western began to lose force as the primary vehicle for making the Indian legible. With the questioning of Manifest Destiny and other foundational American myths in the 1960s, the culture was ready to move on from Cowboys and Indians tales, though the non-Indian public's appetite for stories about Native Americans remained. Around 1970, the Indian Detective novel began to satisfy that need and garner more attention, continuing the centuries-long project of making the Indian legible to non-Indians, wresting the Indian as anti-establishment symbol from the 1960s counterculture, and enlisting him or her in service of Law and Order. The Indian had become the Sheriff, a remarkable but mostly unremarked-upon transformation after more than a century of popular culture almost exclusively depicting Indians as antagonists to "civilization" and American expansion.

The early entrants in the 1970s wave of literary Indian detectives carry over much of the Western's DNA: they patrol the wide-open Desert Southwest, wear badges, and corral desperadoes. They function like generations of popular culture sheriffs and marshals bringing

justice to the frontier, but because they are Indians their investment in American jurisprudence brings on criticism. Ward Churchill considers characters like Leaphorn collaborators with colonial power and traitors to their own people, and Michael Ray Fitzgerald borrows Cedric C. Clark's term for complicit African-American characters, "Regulators," and applies it to Leaphorn's television counterparts like Sam Buckhart of *Law of the Plainsmen* in the late 1950s, 1960s detective John Hawk of *Hawk*, and Nakia Parker of the 1970s series *Nakia*. As crusaders for justice, Buckhart, Hawk, and Nakia stand up to powerful people, and the latter two even rail against unfairness in the system, as befits the tenor of their times, but Fitzgerald is right to spotlight the assimilationist natures of these "regulator" Indian detectives who all ultimately uphold rather than seriously challenge mainstream ideas of right and wrong. He fails, however, to emphasize sufficiently their exotic appeal for many viewers, for it seems such consumers want their fictional Indian characters in varying degrees *both* intriguingly different and comfortingly familiar.

While the three 1970s detectives who launched the Indian Mystery toward subgenre status come out of the same mold, Hillerman's less macho Leaphorn accorded better with the 1970s ethos than the supremely confident protagonists of his competitors Brian Garfield and Richard Martin Stern, and with the introduction of the younger yet more traditionally Navajo Jim Chee in 1980, Hillerman could also present identity issues in more nuanced and satisfying ways, for many readers are fascinated with the between-two-cultures theme. The Mystery is specially suited for mainstream consumers' desires to read about Indians who, in their eyes, are both exotic and assimilated. Reviewing Joel Pfister's *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern* (2004), Chad Uran introduces the idea of a "Dialectic of Diversity Management" to explain Pfister's critique of practices such as the Carlisle Indian School's

warrior brave-themed football pep rallies alongside its better-known before and after photos of “Americanized” Indian youth. I have adapted Uran’s concept to convey how the Mystery genre, with its narrative imperative that a tantalizing puzzle turn into a rational solution, can so well satisfy the dual impulses of the “Dialectic of Diversity” to manage exoticism and assimilation: most white readers and viewers want Indians to be both different (strange, mystical, more in tune with nature, etc.) and the same (sharing recognizable desires, worldviews, motivations, etc.). Mysteries tease readers with the unknown, sometimes with a tinge of the supernatural, but promise through the efforts of (usually) one dogged investigator to reward readers with the truth. The genre that most celebrates rationality, justice, and perhaps individual agency has become the preferred venue in which most non-Indian American readers encounter fictional Indians.

Hillerman’s success from the 1970s onward has helped produce a subgenre’s worth of imitators in print if not on television or movie screens. Most of these Native sleuths have sprung from the imaginations of non-Native writers, and those writers tend to follow the dictates of the genre closely. The relatively few Indians who have written Mysteries with indigenous protagonists, by contrast, have tended to resist, adapt, and transform the genre. Apparently, they find that conventional Mysteries, with their emphasis on individualism and their reassurance that justice will prevail, do not allow Native American writers to tell the kinds of stories they want about Indians.

Chapter One

Native Justice: The Fictional Indian Detective (Finally) Catches On

From 1970 to 1972, three Native American lawmen make their literary debuts. Joe Leaphorn is not the protagonist of Tony Hillerman's *The Blessing Way* (1970), but Hillerman's Harper & Row editor Joan Kahn encouraged him to develop the Native American elements in his fiction ("About Hillerman"), and soon Leaphorn assumed a starring role in the most acclaimed and long-running Indian detective series, eventually sharing the spotlight with the younger Navajo police sergeant Jim Chee. At about the same time, Johnny Ortiz meets the reading public in Richard Martin Stern's *Murder in the Walls* (1971). Stern wrote two more Johnny Ortiz mysteries in the following two years. Then, after a long hiatus, he returned to the character with four more titles from 1988 to 1990—possibly enticed by Hillerman's breakaway commercial success with Leaphorn and Chee. Sam Watchman first pursues criminals in 1972's *Relentless* by Brian Garfield (made into a 1977 TV movie starring Will Sampson). Garfield published one more Sam Watchman novel, *The Threepersons Hunt*, in 1974.

Hillerman, Stern, and Garfield did not newly mint the Indian detective character. Gina Macdonald, Andrew Macdonald, and Mary Ann Sheridan cite the literary type of the Indian scout or tracker as a precursor and note dime novels with titles like Judson R. Taylor's 1882 *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective: A Tale of Startling Mysteries* (2). An Indian sleuth appeared 40 years prior to Leaphorn in 1933, a Scotland Yard detective known only as Eagels (and that's not a typo) in Ian Alexander's *The Disappearance of Archibald Forsyth* (Lewis), and a scattering of such character types emerged in the intervening years. For instance, Burt Reynolds played John Hawk, "a full-blooded Iroquois employed as a special detective with the New York City District Attorney's office" ("Hawk") in an ABC television series called *Hawk* that lasted but half a season in 1966. Detective Lieutenant John Hawk was not the first such character who failed to

score high enough ratings with the television-viewing public; Apache Deputy Marshall Sam Buckhart rounded up bad guys in 1880s New Mexico Territory during the 1959-60 television season in NBC's *Law of the Plainsman*. But something about the early 1970s provided this sort of tale in literary form fertile cultural grounds, for a raft of similarly-themed novels showed up on bookstore shelves in the ensuing decades, enough material perhaps to justify the label "subgenre" for Native American Detective novels. An Amazon.com book search for "Native American detective" on July 9, 2019 yielded more than 2000 results.

Since Hillerman, Stern, and Garfield first popularized the Indian sleuth, enough of these Native American detective novels have been published and read that they must satisfy needs beyond the public's appetite for a whodunit, for countless other types of detective characters could provide that service. This proliferation of fictional Native investigators prompts us to ask what cultural work these novels perform, especially since the critical response—other than book reviews—has been scant. Perhaps Indian detective novels get lost in the mass of mass-marketed mysteries, and most titles don't register in discussions of "Native American Literature" since the overwhelming majority are written by non-Indians. In contrast to that Amazon.com search for "Native American detective" and its impressive results, a search on *Gale Literary Criticism Online* (July 9, 2019) using the keywords "Native American" + "detective" + "novel" yielded 127 results, but only eleven of those speak directly to the Indian detective in literature. Substituting "Indian" for "Native American" nets more titles but not more of the pertinent variety, and "indigenous" is, predictably, no help focusing the search on North American indigenous detective characters. Similarly, swapping "mystery" for "detective" dilutes the search for literary scholarship on whodunits with Native American protagonists. Other databases may divulge more critical commentary, but they likewise will not reveal vigorous and

widespread debate over what this subgenre's rising popularity from the 1970s onward might mean.

The Indian Detective Files

I am aware of two books about Indian Detective fiction published prior to 2019, Gina Macdonald, Andrew Macdonald, and Mary Ann Sheridan's study *Shaman or Sherlock?: The Native American Detective* (2002) and Ray B. Browne's *Murder on the Reservation: American Indian Crime Fiction: Aims and Achievements* (2004). As I made final revisions, Mary Stoecklein published *Native American Mystery Writing: Indigenous Investigations* (2019), which, unlike my study, covers only novels by Indians and two Chris Eyre (Cheyenne and Arapaho) television movie adaptations of Hillerman. I very much look forward to reading it and comparing her ideas about the Indian Mystery with mine.

Shaman or Sherlock? is mostly a celebration of diversity and a consciousness-raising exercise as it divides the country into geographic sectors and surveys the literary Indian detectives operating in each zone. The Mystery has indeed been an "Affirmative Action" genre in that it has moved in the past three plus decades from overwhelmingly featuring straight white male protagonists (especially on the American side of the Atlantic) to offering strong female leads like Sara Peretsky's V.I. Warshawski, gay detectives like R.D. Zimmerman's Todd Mills, and sleuths of many ethnic varieties. It is worth repeating Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan's problematic celebration of the possibilities this multicultural detective fiction wave opens (for, apparently, "American" readers who are from what they call "familiar" cultures):

ethnic detectives have provided a sympathetic voice for often ignored populations, have pushed social, political, and sexual agendas, and, in crossroads cultural encounters, have

served as guides to cultures new to American readers and as interpreters of cultural difference. They make the alien and suspect familiar by perceiving new experiences through the eyes of the Other. These functions are especially true of the Native American detective subgenre. (5)

Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan could have done so more gracefully, but they are right to note the tour guide function of mysteries waving a multicultural banner: detection provides a built-in rationale for didacticism. With its broad appeal, the Mystery genre can deliver such cultural translations to a large chunk of the reading public, as Kathleen Gregory Klein observes: “Recent statistical surveys indicate that 20 to 22 percent of all books sold in the United States are some form of mystery or detective fiction; and, they are equally enjoyed by male and female readers from age seven to adults. Because of this widespread exposure, these novels are considered familiar, accessible, and unthreatening by readers who might be resistant to other texts” (2). Klein does not identify these “recent statistical surveys.” She also published in 1999, but the shelf space devoted to the genre at bookstores and libraries reveals its ongoing popularity, albeit without such scientific-sounding percentages.

Non-Native readers who identify with these Indian detective protagonists may develop awareness and empathy, but that familiarizing function, especially situating these cultural messages in a genre as comfortable as a favorite couch to many readers, should make us at least wary of these claims for cross-cultural connections through reading. Diversity is a good thing, but as critics we need to do more than admire its examples. Like a hard-boiled detective grilling a suspect, we should ask tougher questions about these Native American Detective novels and the sources and effects of their popularity, something Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan do not take on so aggressively in their helpful overview of the field.

Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan *are* skeptical about Indian detective characters they believe smack of tokenism, like Michael Delving's sidekick Bob Eddison in his Dave Cannon series or William Babula's investigation team partner Chief Moses in his Jeremiah St. John series:

Like the racial, ethnic, and religious diversity featured in the frontline platoons of old war movies, the Native American substance of Delving and Babula's characters is so superficial and so clearly manipulative that it deserves no attention. The continued existence of such works, however, reflects a need among some readerships to see Indians played as cultural non-entities, as cartoon figures of feathers and furs in a stereotypical shorthand empty of meaning. (21)

Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan contrast characters like Bob Eddison and Chief Moses, who mostly provide the occasion for weak jokes about Indians, with more sincere print depictions:

This text will investigate only genuine attempts to capture the Other in detective fiction, legitimate efforts to show the difference in personal perspective and worldview between the Native American and mainstream communities about the most important issues of life, about what constitutes criminal or aberrant behavior, and how it can be brought to light and rooted out. (21-22)

Given that some detective novels present Native American identity with all the impact of a fashion choice or a Zodiac sign, I can understand Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan's almost sanctimonious tone here, but they do not spell out so clearly their criteria for separating "genuine attempts" and "legitimate efforts" from fraudulent and illegitimate ones to "capture the Other" (a

freighted metaphor!). For a more complete cultural history, the full range of such depictions “deserves” attention.

Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan place their study of Indian detective novels in the broadest possible context of Native versus Western worldviews. Of Hillerman’s Navajo lawmen duo they write

Leaphorn and Chee, representing the ratiocinative Western and the intuitive native traditions, respectively, bridge the cultural chasms that separate mainstream and native cultures. Leaphorn is very much in the Sherlock Holmes school of ratiocinative deduction, while Chee, as a shaman, follows traditional Navajo ways to knowledge. Chee does not carry his shamanism as far, however, as do most modern native detectives, and instead sees it as a cultural counter to evil to restore harmony. (8)

It’s impossible to approach these questions of authenticity with no preconceptions; nobody starts fresh when judging a text or a person as legitimately or genuinely Indian. For Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan, the gauge is whether and how well the text handles this clash of what they see as essentialist worldviews. Acknowledging that both Brian Moore and Oliver LaFarge are non-Native, Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan hold up their novels as serious presentations of the contrast between Indian and European ways of knowing:

A measure of the competence and seriousness of the works of detective fiction discussed in the chapters that follow is the degree to which they at least acknowledge the dramatically different worldviews delineated in our discussions of [Moore’s] *Black Robe* and [LaFarge’s] *Laughing Boy*. Stories that ignore this difference or that reduce it to minor questions of etiquette or “lifestyle” are usually simply exploiting the popularity of the genre. (38)

It's not unfair to ask a novel about detection with an Indian protagonist to dramatize a cultural epistemological difference, but we need to be cautious about the circularity of such a litmus test; Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan are saying Indians are traditionally more intuitive in their thinking, and *this* particular novel corresponds nicely with that belief.

Despite their generalization about Native intuition versus Western rationality, Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan caution against reductionist understandings of difference, acknowledging the “hundreds of different tribes, cultures, and ways” of Indians. But as soon as they offer this useful reminder about the complexities of Indian identity, they follow up with the reductionist notion that real Indianness resides either far away on the reservation or masked by acculturation, and without even thinking through from where they are measuring the distance between genuine Native Americans and the mainstream: “authentic Native Americans are more distant than they have ever been, set apart on usually isolated reservations or hidden behind layers of assimilation” (11). These critics do convey the Native American Mystery's “tour guide” function for non-Native readers, but they do not consider how the genre itself shapes the answers the curious outsider will acquire about Indians. Their strategy is informed by this model of competing worldviews: “This text will explore this division between a mainstream outlook on crime and a native viewpoint, for herein lies the deepest, most divisive gulf between the cultures” (8). Given that most of the books they analyze are written by non-Indians, it's not apparent what counts as a “native viewpoint.”

Like any other reader, I have opinions about which Native American Mysteries score higher on verisimilitude. But unlike Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan, I believe the whole range of fictional Indian detectives, from plausible to laughable, is worth studying, not to confer legitimacy on any of these characters over other characters—it's not really my place to do so—

but to understand how they function culturally to shape or reinforce images of Indians. Of course Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan have spent a page discussing these two particular characters they deem unworthy of discussion, Bob Eddison and Chief Moses (21-2), but they could also reserve some of their skepticism for the supposedly legitimate Indian detectives even as they acknowledge that “oftentimes the Native American detective is as much a fantasy figure as some of his predecessors, the nineteenth-century scouts and guides—fictional human nature, not sociological fact, dominates most of the writers we will discuss” (11).

One can tell from the subtitle of *Murder on the Reservation: American Indian Crime Fiction: Aims and Achievements* (2004) that Ray B. Browne likewise mostly lauds this growing niche in the Mystery genre. A founding figure in American Cultural Studies, Browne spent decades examining the power of popular culture. In *Murder on the Reservation*, he makes enthusiastic and even extravagant claims for the Indian Detective novel’s salutary effects. For instance, he argues that “a people increasingly the subject of literature becomes visible and strong” (11). I suppose the move from (often nameless and faceless) object/antagonist in generations of Westerns to subject/protagonist in these more recent Mystery novels *can* promote awareness and empathy in readers, but it’s not clear how that popular culture spotlight leads to strength, or even what Browne means by strength. Much depends on the nature of the representations, who produces those images, and for what audiences and purposes. The minstrel show, one of the nineteenth-century’s reigning forms of popular culture, masked—literally and figuratively—real black people and did not somehow confer strength beyond, perhaps, revealing black power over white imaginations, as Eric Lott notes: “Minstrel performers often attempted to repress through ridicule the real interest in black cultural practices they nonetheless betrayed—minstrelsy’s mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation, what Homi Bhabha would

call its ‘ambivalence’ (‘Other’ 18) and what my title loosely terms ‘love and theft’” (6). So we should temper Browne’s faith in the democratizing power of popular culture, even if we should explore the desires driving popular culture representations and acknowledge that popular culture like minstrelsy and detective novels must reflect and influence attitudes.

Browne sees popular culture as an arena where society works through problems:

If to know is to understand and to understand is to be empathic, then ethnic crime fiction is doing Americans a good turn in helping to develop a society in which all members enjoy the rights and privileges promised by the Constitution. And it is accomplishing its goals to a degree other, more elite and therefore more limited, fiction cannot. Exposure to popular fiction may like the wheels of the gods grind slowly but it [smooths] out inequities. (22)

Browne’s is an upbeat “marketplace of ideas” vision of popular culture, but access to this particular marketplace, the Indian detective novel, is limited to a small number of producers and their ideas, and I can see no reason why “ethnic crime fiction” could not sharpen inequities rather than grind them smooth. And the very notion of social progress is contested territory. Browne accentuates the homogenizing force of shared popular culture:

Popular literature, and especially ethnic crime fiction, is helping to level the cultural field and to meliorate or soften the antagonistic feeling toward Indians—and other minorities—held in the past and at the same time to bring identity and dignity to the subjects of such fiction by erasing the color and social lines and making them full-fledged Americans. (22)

Not everyone would subscribe to this “full-fledged Americans” version of social harmony, or that some people need to be *made* into full-fledged Americans (by detective novels or other means).

For example, Audra Simpson (Kahnawake Mohawk) would not cheer such a goal. She argues that tribes fighting through the court systems of colonizing nations and acceding to a politics of reconciliation and recognition lend undeserved legitimacy to settler states. Simpson’s rejection of the concept of recognition will surprise many since they regard recognition as a boon for peoples those settler states have historically tried to erase. But the very term “recognition” underscores the power imbalance, given who has the authority to recognize and who must seek recognition. Simpson advocates that indigenous peoples adopt a politics of “refusal” instead of engaging with settler state jurisprudence and thus consenting to colonialism.

Thomas King’s (Cherokee) “Borders” (1993) dramatizes refusal on an individual level. The story’s opening introduces the line between settler states: “When I was twelve, maybe thirteen, my mother announced that we were going to Salt Lake City to visit my sister who had left the reserve, moved across the line, and found a job” (131). At the border, the mother refuses to declare herself either Canadian or American, so mother and son are first denied entry into the U.S. and then blocked from reentry into Canada; to the customs agents’ repeated question of her citizenship, she steadfastly answers “Blackfoot.” Marooned in the space between the two countries, they sleep in their car and live on snacks from the duty-free shop for a couple days until the Americans relent in the spotlight of growing media attention. To her mind, assenting to the terms of the border guards’ insistent question would legitimize the line the two colonial nations have drawn through Blackfoot territory, which historically divided kin from each other and continues to do so, including her daughter Laetitia and her children’s father, who is an

American citizen. The mother and son journey onwards to Salt Lake City and return to Canada without knuckling under to Canadian-U.S. border protocol.

Lines of jurisdiction like that international border figure prominently in Indian Detective novels, as do non-geopolitical divisions between people such as race or class. Indeed, Native Mysteries often highlight those “color and social lines” in exploring crime and justice rather than erase them as Browne suggests. Browne maintains that either Indian or non-Indian writers can advance social integration, but two antonymous words in the following quotation suggest the converse impulses of these fictions: “This literature . . . written by such people as Tony Hillerman and the other authors in this study, although keeping Indian culture visible and distinct before the reader, demonstrates that quite clearly all people are the same under the sky, that superficial differences are only color deep” (22). This word “distinct” nods to the exoticizing function of these texts, the yin to their assimilating yang. I find myself hoping that Browne will give more consideration to that exoticizing function but also ask some sharper questions about the resonance of “same” in his assimilationist message “all people are the same.”

Ward Churchill does not shy away from asking tough questions, though he may not enjoy answering them: his own claims to Indian identity have attracted serious criticism from Indian commentators. He takes a thoroughly skeptical view of the Hillerman phenomenon in “Hi-Ho Hillerman...(Away).” For Churchill, figures like Leaphorn and Chee are agents of white America’s colonialism. Churchill notes that tribal police forces such as the one employing Leaphorn and Chee were not indigenous creations but were imposed from without as a means of control, drawing from a pool of collaborators: “the role of these Indian surrogates for U.S. power has never been especially abstract. In a number of instances, those who were to become the nucleus of the original police units had served as scouts for the army, fighting against their own

people's struggles to remain free and independent" (82). Many of these scouts would not have shared Churchill's expansive sense of "their own people" and were enlisted to help fight rival tribes, but he makes a valid point; despite their tussles with the Feds over jurisdiction and their comments on injustice in Indian Country, Leaphorn and Chee do little to challenge U.S. colonialism, which must contribute to their warm reception from readers. The novels' politics are just provocative enough that readers feel enlightened on the issues, but not so incendiary that their sense of the American project is seriously threatened.

Critical voices like Churchill's have done little to nothing to slow the march of the Indian detectives across America's bookshelves, online catalogues, and (to a much lesser extent) screens, which makes it even more important to continue asking his question of whose interests these tales serve. Churchill considers not just what sorts of characters Hillerman's novels uphold as exemplary, and by extension, those of others writing Indian protagonists who enforce "Law and Order," but also the shifting ideological functions of the mystery genre itself as it is adapted to explain and justify American values and actions. Of course, I will cover a much wider breadth of texts than Churchill's brief broadside attack on one writer, but I will also go into greater depth in considering how the Mystery genre works for readers.

The Scope of this Investigation

Mysteries are designed to captivate, tease, confound, and ultimately satisfy readers with a solution. The ways they construct puzzles, the methods the detectives follow as they work through the maze, and the dispensations of justice as the texts conclude shape the ideological impact on readers. To discern patterns, we will survey a good many specimens of the Native American Detective Novel and examine many of them more closely. As Native American

Detective Novels I count texts that feature a Native American protagonist investigating a crime. That leaves plenty of material to discuss, but it cuts out a great deal more: gathering all the mysteries that include Indian characters or Native American thematic elements would be a huge project, since Indians are common guest stars in such novels and “Indian Country” is a popular colorful setting for these misdeeds. Many well-established detective series do an Indian episode. For example, Randy Wayne White’s *twenty-first* Doc Ford mystery, *Bone Deep* (2014), entices prospective readers with this cover blurb: “When a Crow Indian acquaintance of Tomlinson’s asks him to help recover a relic stolen from his tribe, Doc Ford is happy to tag along—but neither Doc nor Tomlinson realize[s] what they’ve let themselves in for.” A story like *Bone Deep* contributes to popular culture messages about Indians, messages worth studying, but I find the move of Indian characters from the periphery (Tomlinson’s “acquaintance”) to the center as protagonists more crucial to address since it is such a departure from Indians milling around the margins of Mysteries.

For that same reason, I will examine novels in which the protagonist is solving a crime, not committing one. Though many detectives bend the rules with their extra-legal maneuvering, they perform these “maverick” (or, I suppose, “renegade”) acts in the name of crime-solving. The dogged investigator who won’t let protocol keep him/her from discovering the truth is a staple of the Mystery genre. In Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939) when General Sternwood interviews Philip Marlowe to decide whether to hire him for a missing person case, we get this terse bit of hard-boiled dialogue:

“You didn’t like working for Wilde?”

“I was fired. For insubordination. I test very high on insubordination, General.”

“I always did myself, sir. I’m glad to hear it.” (10)

And we readers are likewise supposed to approve of Marlowe's fierce independent streak. The lone wolf crime-fighting figure makes plenty of appearances in stories featuring Indian detectives. Joe Leaphorn is annoyed when he can't contact his new underling Jim Chee and thinks

this absence-without-permission business exactly fit Chee's reputation. When the kid had worked out of Tuba City, Captain Largo used to complain about the trouble he had getting Chee to follow regulations. At Crownpoint it had been the same story. There his brains had gotten him acting sergeant stripes when he was still green, and his habit of doing his own thing had gotten him busted just as fast. (Hillerman, *Sacred Clowns* 239-40)

In another typical, even generic, exchange from S. D. Tooley's *When the Dead Speak* (1999), Sam Casey, a Lakota sergeant in the Chicago PD, gets chewed out by her chief for unofficial freelance police work: "Once your face starts showing up on camera and the mayor asks me to check it out, I know it's time to rein you in" (35). The police chief kowtows to higher-ups because he hopes to get promoted to Commissioner, but our hero won't let career calculations get in the way of her quest for justice. What counts as justice is a matter of constant community debate over shared values, and detective novels contribute to those debates, but more typically they convey the search for truth as an individual's story. The novel's tendency to spotlight the individual protagonist is a powerful source of appeal for readers raised in an individualistic culture, especially when reading about cultures that may be more communal. Personal stories connect with the reading public, and we always look for individual representatives from unfamiliar cultures. No matter whether the representatives offered by Indian detective novels

play fast and loose with the rules or proceed by the book, these strongly individualized characters deliver a vision of communal justice.

On the other hand, readers also enjoy seeing cooperation and fellowship dramatized, and there is a subgenre of detective fiction that spotlights the interplay of law enforcement officers rather than the exploits of a singular hero: the Police Procedural. Peter Messent sees a shift away from the private eye of the hard-boiled detective tradition and toward the police procedural subgenre that better reflects the teamwork of crime-solving. He casts the private eye as a figure of “romantic individualism,” still popular with readers but largely “irrelevant” to the realities of modern-day cooperative policing (38). Perhaps this greater verisimilitude explains the rising popularity of Police Procedurals, but the sense of shared endeavor they project may hold even greater appeal: the frustrations and rewards of working within an organization resonate with many readers even if they have gotten no closer to crime fighting than a paperback novel. Many Native American detective novels convey the camaraderie of the police force, and these friendly working relationships can bolster our estimation of protagonists by revealing the affection and approval of their peers, and/or a sense of awe at their superior abilities. Sergeant Tony Lopez plays the Dr. Watson role for Richard Martin Smith’s Detective Johnny Ortiz, but, in a common theme throughout these Indian mysteries, the protagonist is celebrated for uncanny powers of intuition as much as or more than for any Sherlock Holmes rationality, and these powers are usually attributed to the character’s Apache heritage:

Tony Lopez was a native of Santo Cristo and Hispanic through and through. The Spanish and Anglo side of Johnny caused him no difficulty. It was only when, as now, Johnny’s Indian traits seemed to appear that Tony mentally threw up his hands and sometimes

found it difficult to refrain from crossing himself as protection against he knew not what.

(The Missing Man 15)

The sergeant is reacting to his boss's incredible tracking abilities, which border on the supernatural to Tony. The irony of the "through and through" (whatever that means) "Hispanic" Tony equating mystical qualities with Indians rather than Anglos or Hispanics yet wanting to bless himself for divine inoculation goes unrecognized by Tony, and perhaps the author as well.

More conventionally thinking foils like Tony Lopez are fairly common across the Mystery genre, and they range from the fawning Watson variety to peeved and frustrated rivals like the Prefect of Police in Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin tales. It's a safe bet that the characters we readers approve also approve of the protagonist, and the ones we see as flawed do not approve of the protagonist; that's one way, in addition to the whodunit appeal, a Mystery novel keeps us invested in the detective's quest. Whatever the relationships, these foils and the secondary law enforcement characters help direct the spotlight onto the protagonist and suggest a social/professional dimension that apparently pleases readers. Even a hard-boiled loner like Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe has his pal Bernie Ohls in the District Attorney's office.

Sharing that spotlight between two leads, however, opens up great possibilities for workplace drama. No one writing Indian detectives has better blended in these appealing social aspects of the Police Procedural than Tony Hillerman with the dual protagonists his series eventually features. That split protagonist contributes much to his success. The crimes and criminals come and go throughout the series, but the evolving relationship between grizzled veteran Joe Leaphorn and idealistic youngster Jim Chee sustains our interest from episode to episode. Readers don't want to follow the efforts of faceless bureaucrats laboring within large organizations, but they also may be less inclined to choose the lone crusader for justice than

previous generations were; Hillerman nicely balances hero and social entity with his duo. And readers may especially hunger for portrayals of vital relationships in novels about Native American characters; the inclusive feeling of workplace, familial, and/or cultural affiliation touches many raised in a society celebrating those alienated heroes that detective novels have offered for decades.

But what about those novels in which a protagonist or group, rather than just being “loose cannons” who bend the law to fight crime, break laws strictly for their own benefit? They may follow a criminal honor code, but these protagonists seek to commit crimes rather than solve them. The movie incarnations of such tales have earned their own label: “The caper (or heist) film can be one of the most entertaining genres, as you watch an intricate plan unfold, go wrong, and succeed. These films can be great dramas or fantastic comedies, with the odd romance thrown in on top” (“Great Caper/Heist Films”). Tony Hilfer, like many others, offers a less playful-sounding name for their literary equivalents; he calls his study of novels starring lawbreakers *The Crime Novel: A Deviant Genre* (1990). In *Murder on the Reservation: American Indian Crime Fiction: Aims and Achievements*, Ray B. Browne suggests that “crime fiction” has supplanted the equivalent term “detective fiction”: “crime fiction—or detective fiction, as it used to be called” (3). Browne offers an illuminating discussion of the many purposes of crime or detective fiction, but he gives no explanation for this purported shift in terminology, nor does he instruct us what to think about it. Rather than mashing together all texts that deal with crime under the broad banner of crime fiction, I find Hilfer’s distinction useful, for a text celebrating or even just closely following the commission of a crime provides different satisfactions than one cheering on the people trying to solve it. But I am not finding crime novels that feature Native American protagonists. There must be discomfort in the reading

public with such a character, perhaps due in part to a notion that it's no longer okay to present "savage" Indians. Despite the many tough and dangerous Indians in Mysteries, including Native American Detective Novels, these texts often reveal the main culprit as either NOT Indian or NOT REALLY Indian. Critiquing Hillerman's Leaphorn and Chee mysteries, Churchill sees condescension in this tendency to assign whites to the villain role: "Euroamericans are *always* the smart guys, manipulating Indians in criminal endeavors, *never* the other way around" (84 italics in original). We will meet some clever Indians besides the protagonists in our survey of Native American Detective Novels, and even some murderous ones, but that pattern of giving non-Indian characters greater agency when it comes to committing crime generally holds.

Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* teases readers with the possibility of such a protagonist but ultimately confounds our desire to know the truth—it's not clear if we have a homicidal Indian protagonist or not. Activist Native student Marie Polatkin challenges white academic Indian "expert" Dr. Clarence Mathers's assertion that the Indian Killer, so called because bloody owl feathers have been left on a scalped victim's body and a kidnapped child's pillow, is a "revolutionary construct," an Indian who "has physically and metaphorically stolen a European-American child":

"You think Indians are the only ones who know how to use a knife? . . . I mean, calling him the Indian Killer doesn't make any sense, does it? If it was an Indian doing the killing, then wouldn't he be called the Killer Indian? I mean, Custer was an Indian killer, not a killer Indian. How about you, Doc, are you an Indian killer?" (245-7)

The novel never actually confirms whether its title refers to an Indian who kills or someone who kills Indians. Perhaps even the idea of a Native American killer protagonist and/or the refusal to

reveal “whodunit” makes this provocative text less-embraced by readers and critics alike than much of Alexie’s other work.

Just to take the temperature of the novel’s public reception (as opposed to its reception from professional reviewers and critics), as of July 9, 2019, *Indian Killer* scores a respectable 3.78/5 average rating on *Goodreads.com*, but that’s lower than any of Alexie’s other novels or short story or poetry collections. For example, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* rates a 4.09 average by *Goodread.com*’s reviewers, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* comes in at 4.11. More telling, however, is the relative number of raters and reviewers for each novel: *Indian Killer* has 7,091 ratings and 587 reviews, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 22,635 ratings and 1,868 reviews, and *The Absolutely True Diary* an impressive 205,772 ratings and 22,388 reviews. Granted, the latter came out in 2007, the same year this website was launched, while *Indian Killer* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto* were published in 1993 and 1996, and *The Absolutely True Diary* is aimed at a younger adult audience who might be more likely to declare their personal tastes online. Still, the disparity between the numbers of people motivated to click on stars or type their thoughts about these three Alexie books indicates *Indian Killer*’s cooler reception. Customer reviews on *Amazon.com* as of July 7, 2019 reveal similar proportions of relative interest: 1,982 for *The Absolutely True Diary*, 357 for *The Lone Ranger and Tonto*, and 125 for *Indian Killer*. There is a much smaller audience for an Indian serial killer novel (or at least this novel that *may* feature an Indian serial killer) than for Alexie’s other offerings, which are also sharp-edged but much more leavened with humor. As Nancy Stauffer observes in a mostly favorable review, “some readers will miss the lyricism and humor of the author’s early work, but this novel offers abundant evidence of a most promising talent extending its range.”

Alexie gets credit for exploring new artistic territory rather than trying to replicate previous successes, but our journey with him is not pleasant. *Indian Killer* is a painful read, full of people hurting, and people hurting each other. Of course, an uplifting message is not a requirement of good or great literature, but I suspect that *Indian Killer*'s rubbing readers' noses in racial violence and raising all kinds of tough racial issues *without* offering any solutions turns off many readers. Alexie's unwillingness to play by the detective genre's rules and provide a moral of the story lead Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan to lament "what could have been an effective tool for raising the consciousness of readers is instead reduced to undirected sound and fury. Alexie intends to stir up controversy, and the beatings and murders are meant to raise hackles rather than lead to detection, a character study of a criminal or psychotic, social justice, or exploration of the gray areas of the law" (*Shape-Shifting* 166). Indeed, Indian writers like Alexie have tended to push back against the demands of the mystery genre while countless non-Native writers of Indian mysteries adhere closely to the formula. Something about the detective novel's "standard operating procedure" makes most Indian writers avoid the genre altogether, and those that do make creative use of the genre often parody and/or transform it.

With *Indian Killer*, Sherman Alexie took a sharp turn from the humorous tone and wry characters that helped make *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* his breakout hit, and many fans were likely disappointed that they did not receive the poignancy and laughter that they had come to expect. That many readers did not "want" an Indian like John Smith leads us the question what kinds of Indians *do* readers want? The popularity of Indian Detective Novels (a subgenre Alexie skewers in *Indian Killer* even as he riffs creatively on the form) shows that many readers have an appetite for detective characters representing cultures different from their own, but they largely want to meet those characters on familiar ground and they want those

characters to operate within recognizable parameters. And yet they want them on that familiar ground and within those recognizable parameters *without* the Indian detectives being indistinguishable from non-Indian protagonists in other Mysteries.

The Dialectic of Diversity

I argue that the Mystery novel provides a ready vehicle for satisfying these divergent needs. Chad Uran entitles his review of Joel Pfister's *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern* (2004) "Assimilation and Exoticism: The Dialectic of Diversity Management." Uran notes how Pfister "brings a welcome level of complication to the picture of Indian life at [the] Carlisle" school. Yes, there are the "(in)famous before-and-after photographs of students first in their tribal dress and then in school uniforms" that proudly attest to the school's assimilating function. But Uran reports that Pfister also sees a countervailing force at play in examples like the school's football team:

[Superintendent] Pratt, a man bent on civilizing his students, allowed the team to stage elaborate scalping and burnings of effigies representing their competitors at Cornell and Penn. . . . Carlisle football players could reimagine themselves as warriors, and thereby recover a traditional path toward social and spiritual distinction. Their performance on the field, well covered by the press, played up the metaphor of football as tribal war, with yardage standing in for territory, and the victorious Carlisle team symbolically winning back their land against what would become the Ivy League.

Uran sums up the point: "perhaps, Pfister argues compellingly, Pratt realized so long as they behaved like gentlemen in competition, then it was a good thing for his students to use both 'Indian' and 'civilized' performances strategically" (585-6).

Pfister's reading of these students' dual roles informs my approach to Native American detective novels, but Uran's review provides me the most useful critical tools for this study. Pfister is interested in these performers and how their diversity was managed, but in examining fiction I am primarily concerned with the reception of representations of Indianness. What did the mostly non-Indian consumers make of such spectacles as the before and after photos and the Indian warriors on the gridiron? Here Uran concisely characterizes these audiences' divided and incompatible interests. As Uran suggests, the dominant culture has a dialectical desire to have it both ways with popular culture representations of Indians; non-Indian audiences sought to enjoy the encounter with what they saw as exotic *and* to be reassured about their commonality with the performers. Since novelists writing Indian Mysteries invent characters and plots rather than prescribe real people's behavior, "management" may not apply to fiction as well as it does to live performances or school photographs, so I have adapted Uran's "Dialectic of Diversity Management" as the Dialectic of Diversity for my literary critical purposes. Still, we should consider Native American Detective novels written by non-Indians *as* a form of diversity management. These novels manage public ideas about Indian difference through representation, and the Dialectic of Diversity helps us understand how they do so. It makes us focus on the way Indian Detective Novels, both those written by cultural outsiders and the much smaller number penned by Indians, balance and rebalance assimilation and exoticism.

Hillerman dramatizes this Dialectic of Diversity through the conflicts he stages within and between Leaphorn and Chee over how to be a Navajo and how to be a cop, surely one reason readers have responded enthusiastically to his portrayals. Consumers seem to look for varied performances of Indianness that encompass, in a single character or with an ensemble cast, the assimilationist imperative (we all share similar experiences of the world and have many dreams

and values in common) and the yearning for exoticism (Indians as spiritual, communal, more attuned to nature, etc.).

The Mystery genre is well-suited to cater to these conflicting impulses toward the strikingly unfamiliar and the comfortingly familiar. At its narrative heart is the unknown, and the promise of making that mystery known propels readers forward as they follow the detective's endeavors to discover the truth. And though the mystery plot enables these novels to produce creative tension between unknown and known, that plot-to-uncover-a-plot Mystery formula is also the *most well-known* feature of these novels. Because the books promise the recognized rewards of the whodunit, they are relatively easy to market to readers, especially since Hillerman's success. An excerpt of a *Denver Post* review is pasted as a cover blurb on James Doss's *The Witch's Tongue* (2004): "Doss does for the Utes what Tony Hillerman has done for the Navajo." It's a reasonable sales pitch given the thematic echoes between the two detective series, but such language assumes that tribes like the Navajo and Ute want or need anyone to do something *for* them. And without discounting Hillerman's "Navajo Tribal Council's commendation" ("Tony Hillerman"), such language precludes an alternative way of casting the relation between a writer from outside a culture and the group of people about whom he/she crafts stories: "Doss does *to* the Utes what Tony Hillerman has done *to* the Navajo." Navajos and Utes read Hillerman and Doss, of course, but the novelists are careful to provide their cultural outsider readers enough context; they never assume knowledge about Navajos, Utes, or other Indians, and they try to supply the necessary lessons in diegetically natural ways. Hillerman, Doss, and many other non-Native writers wrap interesting cultural information in familiar Mystery novel packaging. Although many readers are attracted to cultures different from their own, and some non-Indian readers are especially fascinated by Indians, many readers

prefer encountering those other cultures on well-known turf. But the very nature of the Mystery genre restricts the messages about Native Americans that these books transmit. While a detective novel provides a great platform for dramatizing injustice, the terms of its contract promise readers that a crime will be solved through the clever and vigorous actions of a protagonist or at most a few individuals, which inevitably simplifies problems and solutions to real social evils.

Call it the *Thunderheart* syndrome, after the 1992 film starring Val Kilmer, Sam Shepard, and Graham Greene. By the end of the movie, Kilmer's character Ray Levoi has gotten in touch with his lost Indian heritage and solved the crimes by exposing the corrupt white FBI agent supposedly responsible for the reign of terror and impending ecological disaster on the reservation. The happy Hollywood ending ensures us that once this rotten apple is removed, the system will resume serving justice. The movie *seems* politically progressive toward Indian oppression yet does nothing to challenge the power structures that perpetuate it. That sort of maneuver is probably why, despite Hillerman's novels' surely heartfelt critiques of injustice, they will be more satisfying and less disturbing to the reading public than a novel like Alexie's *Indian Killer*, which offers readers no reassurance that justice is being done, and no escape from a feeling of culpability (on top of its refusal to honor the Mystery contract and answer whodunit). What if the perpetrators of Indian oppression were not just individual non-Indian villains who could be sacrificed to spare our thinking about real change?

But arguing that Mystery novels are not likely to launch the revolution is far from arguing that they are insignificant. First, they do more to maintain the status quo than undermine it, despite the consciousness-raising that Ray B. Browne celebrates. Second, about that consciousness-raising, Mystery novels transmit cultural messages, accurate or inaccurate

information about peoples or attitudes toward them. And finally, for these reasons and countless others, the stories a society produces and consumes *matter*. Theorizing about *Moby-Dick*, Uncle Luther in Choctaw and Cherokee writer Louis Owens's *The Sharpest Sight* makes the case well from his Indian perspective:

“[Ishmael] was in bed with the Indian, and they shared the Indian's pipe, and that made them one thing then, like they was man and woman all the same. And that's a kind of balance, you see, Indian and white and man and woman, two bloods in one. When that white storyteller come bouncing up on the Indian's coffin, he killed off half of himself and he lost his power but didn't know it.

“I like to read these books because they're always making up stories, and that's how they make the world the way they want it. This storyteller understood the way the world really was, with everything in balance, good spirits and bad one and all, but then he changed the story. You see, we got to be aware of the stories they're making about us, and the way they change the stories we already know.” (91)

If the stories matter, then, as Luther insists, “we got to be aware” of them. His “we” and “they” are, respectively, Indians and whites, though it's certainly useful for all writers and readers to ponder the consequences of stories, including stories written by whites about Indians.

The Native American Mystery has grown popular enough to influence the public's images of Indians. That detective novels spotlight gripping social issues without asking readers to do anything about them (these texts are not usually included in the Social Protest novel category) is but one of the genre's conditions and perhaps attractions, if not one consciously understood by most readers. On the other hand, the brainteaser aspect of this genre overtly entices readers, who enjoy both the intellectual challenge of matching wits with a detective and,

truth be told, probably also enjoy the comfort food of a recognizable brand. But readers tend to bring expectations to Indian materials that they may not bring to just any Mystery novel.

Discussing the reception of two Indian autobiographies by an Italian critic, Robert Berner notes how Elemire Zolla finds Luther Standing Bear's Sun Dance account inferior to Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance's because it lacks a supernatural quality, even though (as Zolla did not know) "Sylvester Clark Long . . . called himself Long Lance and did have some Indian ancestors but certainly was not the Blackfoot he claimed to be. And if Standing Bear is not adequately 'supernatural' to satisfy Zolla, he was certainly full-blood Sioux" (73). Granted, spiritual subject matter like the Sun Dance may heighten the desire for a supernatural flavor, but readers bring to all sorts of texts this notion (perhaps barely recognized or articulated) of authentic Indianness as infused with the supernatural. Therefore, many of these Indian Mystery novels don't simply offer a Native American in the starring role and present a tale of brains and/or brawn vanquishing evil; they also allow readers to flirt with or enjoy the supernatural, thus playing up the exotic appeal for cultural tourists. Certainly, mystery novels of all stripes sometimes include a touch or more of the supernatural, but the Native American Detective subgenre habitually blends magic into its criminal acts as well as their detection.

To illustrate, a back cover blurb from Robert Westbrook's *Ancient Enemy* (2001) reads "in San Geronimo, New Mexico, a bizarre murder unearths the ancient secrets of the Anasazi. And rumors of evil flesh-eating spirits run rampant," and the publicity for Marquayla Lorette's *The Eyes Tell No Lies* (2013) announces that "in Book One of the Truth Beneath the Lies Series: Grace is a journalist who uses her Cherokee powers to help the police solve crimes. This last crime, though, she didn't heed her ancestors' warning" ("The Eyes Tell No Lies"). Sometimes, in the style of the popular children's cartoon *Scooby-Doo*, these supernatural elements are

explained away when the mystery is solved; sometimes an uncanny residue remains and readers are left wondering if rationality can encompass the entire story; and sometimes the texts are unapologetically fantastic—the witches remain witches and the detectives retain their special Indian powers. No matter how far up any given text scores on the magic meter, however, it is curious that, with the turn away from the Western as producer of Indian myth, the genre that *most celebrates the triumph of the rational* has taken its place as the popular culture vehicle where so many Non-Indian people encounter representations of Indians. Non-Indian readers apparently want to be reassured by these morality tales that justice will be served, and that for all their cultural quirks and even supernatural sheen, these Indians are recognizably similar in worldview to themselves.

Making the Indian Legible

Indian detective fictions join the broader American (and, indeed, *pre*-United States) project to make the Indian legible. Indian tales have been perennially popular, and it is beyond my scope to chart the shifting reasons for that appeal and its effects on readers and viewers over the centuries, but to understand better how the Indian detective fits into or recalibrates patterns of representation, we can trace some broad contours leading up to the appearance of Indian characters who represent authority and possess sharp intellects as well as (or instead of) tribal wisdom or supernatural acuity. Such characters are commonplace enough now, but in retrospect, and given the long accumulation of adversarial and/or unsophisticated Indian images that non-Indian America has produced and consumed, it was a dramatic popular culture shift to present an Indian with a badge in a starring role.

From accounts of first contact through captivity narratives and the pervasive Western of the last century, popular culture has mostly highlighted difference rather than commonality between Native Americans and non-Indians, serving the exoticizing imperative of the Dialectic of Diversity. While popular culture representations have tended to render the Indian legible through Othering—strange, unknowable, but still situated by their difference—the U.S. government has actively worked toward the assimilationist goal of erasing difference, blatantly so prior to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and somewhat less aggressively afterward. Such policies as the establishment of reservations, trying to turn Indians into homesteaders who would farm just like their white neighbors, the 1887 Dawes Act's Allotment imperative to plant individual Indians on specific parcels of land and auction off the "surplus" portions to non-Indians, and the boarding schools' mission to pry Indian children away from their homes and replace their culture with the approved American mode of living are exercises of domination that further the longstanding goal to make the Indians legible in their sameness to the rest of "us."

Philip J. Deloria outlines these programs to "transform conquered enemies into colonial subjects," or, as I cast it, to make them legible to non-Indians by erasing difference:

Consider some of the basic institutions and technologies through which Indian enemies became known as American subjects. Tribal rolls standardized names, often translating them into English. They recorded individuals, along with pertinent demographic information. Church records noted parents, godparents, dates of baptism, confirmation, and death. Ration-disbursement records quantified the amount of food provided an individual and his or her family. Agency records noted infractions, property, character, education, employment, and all manner of other information. Later, allotment records would map individuals and families in space.

“This knowledge,” Deloria concludes, “could be translated into power over Indian people” (25-6). Maintaining such power, however, meant limits on Indians’ “American subject” status. According to Deloria, such limits were put in stark relief by a case such as Lakota Charlie Smith’s killing by a white sheriff’s posse at Lightning Creek, South Dakota, in 1903. The idea that Smith would be accorded the same legal rights as a white victim was just *too much* assimilation for many non-Indians at the time:

In theory, assimilation solved the “Indian problem,” turning Indian people into Americans by “killing the Indian and saving the man.” In practice, many white Americans—particularly those recently intruded into Indian territory—found the prospect of a too close similarity between Indians and non-Indians disquieting.

Deloria explains white fear that full legal rights for Indians could render “a rigorous racial and cultural division between Indian and white . . . no longer tenable” (45). So it is not surprising that at the same time government policies were driving assimilation, popular culture was satisfying the exoticizing urge of the “dialectic of diversity” through spectacles that underlined Indian difference. Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show of white Western progress and Edward Curtis’s photographic 20-volume elegy *The North American Indian* (1907-30) make Indians legible to non-Indians by framing them in accepted roles for their overwhelmingly white audiences: warriors going down in glorious defeat or more primal inhabitants of North America fading into history. But they also present the Indian as ultimately different and *unknowable*—that is how the exoticizing impulse works. Both the exotic messages of these popular culture productions and the assimilationist practices of the federal government, however, assured American citizens that Indians were on the way out.

Popular culture would continue for many decades to promote the myth of the Vanishing Indian, but the federal government adjusted its assimilationist project in the 1930s. The Indian Reorganization Act, or “Indian New Deal,” signaled a major shift from helping speed Indian disappearance through assimilation; there would now be some attempt on the part of the government to acknowledge and even promote Indian cultures and treat at least some Indian groups as sovereign if still subject nations. But the urge to make Indians legible in mainstream society’s terms remained and took on subtler coloration, as Robert Dale Parker explains:

an emerging liberalism was reshaping federal Indian policy, moving from the Dawes Act’s coerced assimilation toward at least an effort to recognize reservation sovereignty. . . . The Indian Reorganization Act sometimes demanded assimilation nevertheless. It led, supposedly, to local reservation rule . . . but it defined local rule according to dominant notions of “democracy.” Whites were not asked to govern themselves by Indian models, but they invited (and pressured) Indians to govern themselves by predominantly white models. (65)

And federal policy moves like the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, which encouraged Native Americans to leave reservations and find jobs and build lives in urban centers, and Termination between the 1940s and 60s, which attempted to remove U.S. recognition of Indian nations and phase out reservations, also served this imperative to assimilate Indians, to make them legible in mainstream America’s terms.

While Indians have been especially subjected to the energies of such assimilationist projects, those federal efforts reflect a fundamental tendency of centralized governments to impose order and uniformity. James C. Scott traces the impulse of central authorities to map their subjects, not to capture the variety and vitality at the local level—Scott insists a map of any

sort could not do so—but to impose a simplified order legible from above. These highly selective maps serve plans to improve society, plans that do not begin at the grassroots but in the offices of ministers and bureaucrats. According to Scott, because these plans do not meaningfully engage the people they are designed to reform, they are doomed to fail, and with often disastrous consequences.

Centrally directed plans such as reservations, allotment, and the Indian boarding schools reflect not just government proclivities but deeper cultural values. They square with mainstream America's organizational imperatives. As Barre Toelken notes,

in Western culture—I suppose in most of the technological cultures—there has been a tremendous stress on lineal measurements, grid patterns, straight lines. I think one reason for this is that technological cultures have felt that it is not only desirable but even necessary to control nature. We know there are very few straight lines in nature. One of the ways people can tell if they are controlling nature is to see that it is put in straight lines—we have to put things “in order.” (54)

Toelken contrasts this linear controlling metaphor with the circle that saturates Navajo culture, echoing such familiar conceptions of Native American worldviews as Paula Gunn Allen's “sacred hoop.” When we talk in the broad sweep of a culture's controlling metaphor, we need to understand the limits of productive distinctions like Toelken's—no culture is monolithic. We stretch the usefulness of the metaphor even thinner when we move beyond discussing one culture, the Navajo, to generalizing about that cultural grouping that did not even exist as a grouping before Europeans landed: Indians. And we need to resist the easy judgment that linear thinking is unhealthy and a circular worldview is wholesome (though such Manichean enthusiasm may itself be a symptom of linear thinking). But the desire for linear legibility

certainly drives America's need to translate "Indian country" into the straight-edge discourse of surveyors and property deeds.

The Hiawatha (1999) by David Treuer (Ojibwe) attests to the limits of such attempts to render lived space as a schematic. Trying to find his way after a long absence from his Minnesota reservation, Simon reflects on the vague connection between the representation and the reality: "While in prison he'd checked out every atlas in the library and searched them for a detailed map of the reservation, but it always appeared as an undifferentiated shape, mildly square, sometimes colored gray, other times pink" (189-90). Here we see both assimilating and exoticizing tendencies: Indian country is a "mildly square" parcel of land fit into the grid, yet these maps color it differently from the surrounding landscape and leave its contents blank, a terra incognita.

Unlike the urban versus rural contrasts as Treuer's novel shifts settings, Wayne Ude's *Becoming Coyote* (1981) takes place almost entirely on a reservation, Montana's Fort Belknap Reservation. One of the "criminals" (the tribal policeman protagonist downplays their criminality even as he dutifully chases them) is apprehended just over the reservation border at the novel's conclusion, which brings up a brief consideration of jurisdiction. The novel is probably more invested in exploring the reservation for readers than in chasing the bad/good guys; Ude works in history lessons and Coyote tales to give a sense of the land's temporality and goes into quite a bit of geographic detail as well. Indeed, he titles the first chapter "Mapping the Reservation." The chapter launches a manhunt by reservation police chief Snook. As Snook and his pilot Sam perform a grid search ("our plan was to fly over the spot where Charley and Joe had seen the buffalo, then continue on to the eastern border and criss-cross from east to west and back again, each time a little further south toward the mountains, until we'd covered the entire

reservation”), he meditates on the complications of layered mappings and feels nostalgia for less circumscribed times:

I’m always a little surprised when one of Sam’s old airplanes gets up in the air with my bulk inside. Perhaps it’s the same surprise the old-timers felt when their visions worked and they, too, drifted above this same ground, saw it entire and at once, stood at the center of the universe and looked down. I can’t see the land as they did; I know too much of boundaries, competing jurisdictions, treaties that revised borders always inward. Still, it’s a satisfaction to look down and see the land as though it were whole, unlimited, free again. (16)

Even more than *The Hiawatha* with its “undifferentiated shapes,” however, Ude’s novel underscores the incomplete grasp of these mapping schemes. There is a liminal space, a “no man’s land,” between the reservation and the ranches owned by non-Indians, that stubbornly defies human domestication and legibility: the “Breaks” along the Missouri, a steep, gullied tumble from plains to river. The novel’s third chapter, “In Coyote’s Ground,” indicates that humans, Indian or non-Indian, have never imposed their will on this landscape. And the novel’s conclusion likewise repudiates the map enforcers’ power. Snook and his deputies eventually run down their quarry after crossing from the reservation onto Bureau of Land Management (BLM) territory, but

Billy White Bull and the old folks would somehow be sending [the BLM, the FBI, and “Washington”] the message that this was a Tribal matter—Tribal in the old sense, before we were an American colony—and not to be settled by outsiders, even if part of it had happened off the Reservation. Boundaries, they would say, had no effect on Tribal

matters, couldn't wash out anyone's Indian blood. The old people wouldn't listen to any arguments that Fisher and I were off our proper turf. (149)

Much conflict in Indian detective novels revolves around such jurisdictional disputes and the exercises of power that boundary lines represent.

As a final illustration, in *Mean Spirit* (1990) Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) dramatizes land grabs at the expense of Indians during the Oklahoma oil boom. Both *Mean Spirit* and *Becoming Coyote* symbolize the assault on nature with white men's failed schemes to fence in and breed buffalo. In *Becoming Coyote*, two young Indians liberate a white rancher's aged buffalo so that they can conduct a buffalo hunt using authentic gear and weaponry "borrowed" from the reservation's history museum, an act that leads to the manhunt. *Mean Spirit* presents Nathan Hale's plan to crossbreed a buffalo bull with cattle as a perversion of nature. Hogan makes sure readers don't miss the symbolic import of the buffalo's demise: Belle "knew the cause of death was a mystery, even to the veterinarian who knew so much about domestic cattle and horses, but she knew the bull had died of sorrow. He died longing for his life on the land, for his freedom, for his buffalo women. And the other Indians agreed with her" (251-2). This heavy-handed allegory shows the costs of "improving" nature. In Hogan's novel, Indians generally represent harmony with nature and whites always run roughshod over it with their plans.

Mean Spirit dramatizes how, rather than just being uninformed about reality on the ground and hostile to nature, the mappers of Indian country can exploit Indians. Belle Graycloud has been trying to hide the oil seep on her land because she has seen Indians swindled and even murdered by speculators, but she fears the secret is revealed when she is bailed out after spending time in jail for stopping white men and boys from exterminating bats in Sorrow Cave: "something on the wall caught her attention and she had a strange look in her eyes. She didn't

turn toward the sheriff for fear he would read her mind. She knew the blood had drained away from her face. But she saw it. On the new yellow geologists map was an oil pool blacked in on her land, beside the spring where the seepage had materialized” (287). Our discussion of legibility adds resonance to the fact that Belle does not want her mind “read” by the aptly-named greedy white sheriff Jess Gold. Mixed-blood Deputy Willis picks up on Belle’s concern, and after she leaves he remarks “God, she’s got oil out there on her allotment land.” Gold informs him that the map is only “conjecture” by an oilman, and adds, “I’m glad you mentioned it. We should take it down before someone gets ideas about Belle’s land.” Gold’s criminal designs have been disguised from both other characters and readers to this point in the novel, but when Willis says “I’ve been thinking about all these crimes. We’re all sure, us Indians, I mean, that Hale is the killer” (287-8), Willis reveals his allegiance through the pronouns “we” and “us,” threatens to expose the conspiracy to seize Indian wealth by any means, and precipitates his getting set up and murdered by Gold.

This struggle over the land and its resources in *Mean Spirit*, over who has the power to map and name, is nicely encapsulated by the town’s dual and dueling identities: “The sign, [Michael Horse] noted with pleasure, had once again been vandalized. Talbert, Oklahoma, was covered with red paint, and WATONA was written over it in large black letters. For the Indians it was still the gathering ground, and not some banker’s hilly red stone town” (55). The Indian name marks a communal space while the white name honors an individual sponsoring and profiting from capitalistic endeavors. Despite these resistant efforts to “paint the town red,” the Graycloud family and federal investigator Stace Red Hawk will ultimately flee the area together in fear for their lives, in effect ceding the territory and reenacting countless such displacements.

Mean Spirit also places the Indian boarding school movement within this soul-stifling ambition to render the Indian legible in white terms. The Graycloud grandchildren and the young girl Nola, whom they try to protect after her mother is slain, are forced to attend the Talbert Indian School, and Belle notes an immediate change in them:

On their first weekend home, Belle was happy to see them, even though they already looked pale and less vibrant. She wanted to know about the school.

“They believe in single file,” Ben said, as if that would tell her everything she needed to know about the place, and it almost did. (89)

Such schools were designed to separate Indians from their cultures and translate them into the mainstream culture’s model of upright American citizens, like, presumably, that white banker Talbert.

Along with real-world boxes like boarding school classrooms, farm fields, and reservations (and, as in *The Hiawatha*, prison cells), the rectangular space Native Americans have most often been fitted into by popular culture representations is the movie screen. American cinema has generally not projected much interest in living Indians until recent Indian-made film. With the Hollywood Western, Native American images saturated popular culture like never before or since, yet those images proclaimed the Indian denizens of the past. Philip Deloria sees a brief window for resistance by indigenous artists to this grand narrative of the Vanishing Indian before movies settled into the familiar grooves of the Western genre. He spotlights Native American filmmakers operating at the dawn of this new medium that would come to dominate image creation and propagation throughout the twentieth century. Early films took their cues from one of the most popular entertainments of the era, the Wild West Show, with its reenactments of settlers besieged by Indians. Other movies in the first decades of the

twentieth century used the template of the domestic melodrama (Deloria 83) to tell stories about Indians, which quickly led to codified plots; Deloria quotes a critic in 1911 already complaining about the movies' predictability (83). Generally, the plots demanded an Indian sacrifice her or himself so that white lovers can unite. According to Deloria, James Young Deer and Princess Red Wing made a series of films that increasingly challenged that narrative imperative of Indian disappearance, culminating in *Young Deer's Return* (1910), in which a Carlisle-educated Indian man wins the love of a white woman and the eventual approval of her father (when, in true melodramatic fashion, he is suddenly revealed as the father's savior many years previous), but "refuses the offer and returns to his own tribe, where he will marry an Indian woman" (99). But such counter-representations by Indians could not win out over films that catered to audiences' expectations, like D. W. Griffith's *Call of the Wild* (1908), where the protagonist shows how thin his veneer of civilization is when he is rejected by a white woman: "Redfeather tears off his fine cloths, beats his chest, grabs a bottle, and returns angrily to his tribe. His warriors capture the woman in the woods, and Redfeather is about to take 'savage' vengeance when she appeals to his sense of religion and talks her way out of the jam" (Deloria 85).

This popular culture debate over whether Indians could or should become part of white society, however, pretty much evaporates from movie theaters in the following decades as Westerns cast Indians firmly in the role of impediments to civilization. The frontier mythologies promoted by the Western hold sway until cultural forces in the 1960s lead to questioning and rejection of "Progress" and the entire American imperial project. Indians had not obliged by vanishing, so new ways to tell stories about Indians in the here and now emerged, including the Native American detective novel.

Novel Casting and the Individual Indian

Many Native American detective novels present Indians in a sympathetic light and even in nuanced human complexity, which is an improvement over the generally limited palette of the Hollywood Westerns (stoic and noble or overemotional and savage). Mystery novels with Indian detectives in the starring role are definitely an improvement over an updated Western like *Dances with Wolves* (1990), which places a white character's experiences at the narrative center, even though that character turns himself into "Dances with Wolves" and takes on an Indian spouse who is actually white, perhaps conveniently so for any in the audience with retrograde ideas about miscegenation. Similarly, the title of *Windtalkers* (2002) promises that the movie will focus our attention on Indians, the World War II Navajo code talkers, but the narrative invests us most in the story of a white soldier tasked with keeping those code talkers safe or, if they are in danger of capture by the Japanese, preventing them from being taken alive. The DVD cover for *Windtalkers* (fig.1) foregrounds Nicholas Cage's character, the white Sergeant Joe Enders:



Fig. 1. "Windtalkers (2002)." Imdb.com,

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0245562/mediaviewer/rm2494471936>.

Granted, Cage has more star power/box office draw than the native actor Adam Beach who plays one of the code talkers, but his prominence in this image (towering over the figures and action in the background) fits a Hollywood pattern of making the white character the protagonist. Unless turned into a movie, novels do not need to make such an appeal based on an actor's recognition from the public; the only analog in novels is an author like Hillerman who achieves celebrity so that his or her name will be displayed most prominently on the cover. Surely that's one reason why novelists have been more apt than filmmakers to feature a Native American protagonist. Other promotional materials (fig. 2) are not so blatant as this DVD cover, but they still foreground the white Joe Enders and his heroic deeds, in this case bravely carrying the wounded Navajo Private Ben Yahzee through horrific battlefield action:

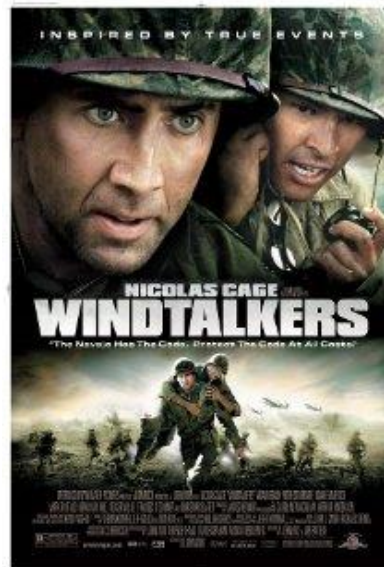


Fig. 2. "Windtalkers (2002). Imdb.com,

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0245562/mediaviewer/rm3408182016>.

A more honest title would be *The Windtalker's Bodyguard*. At least Native American detective novels, unlike most mainstream cinema, track the case through an Indian protagonist rather than filtering the story through a white representative.

So, these Mysteries with an Indian protagonist represent an advance, *may* help non-Indian readers empathize with real Indians, and *may* even promote understanding of oppression. But the Mystery serves one other useful mythologizing function that is less helpful to understanding oppression—and shows how genre narrows the range of messages these texts deliver. Westerns most often pitted individuated white characters against hordes of undifferentiated Indians, and the defeat of those Indians celebrates the triumph of the individual so dear to American identity. Responding to a 1958 John Dos Passos essay on America as the guarantor of individual “elbow room,” Pfister asks

What happens . . . when Dos Passos's common sense about elbow-room individuality is reconsidered within the context of America's long history of elbowing? Dos Passos's reverence for elbow room takes no notice of those who were elbowed out to provide elbow room for others. One might inquire: what did having been elbowed out do to their individuality? Did dominant groups perceive those who were elbowed out as having individuality—or as subindividual, subsingular? (6)

Pfister goes on to answer this last rhetorical question by showing how programs of Indian education like Carlisle's announced their intention to turn Indians *into* individuals. The novel treats the concerns of the (individual) human heart, and we can view these Native American detective novels that feature strongly individualized Indian protagonists as progress from the earlier, generally unquestioned (by white Americans) belief that certain groups of people fully realize their human individuality, and certain do not.

The detective novel as usually practiced is all about individuality: a fiercely determined, shrewd, and even brave protagonist works to determine individual guilt. The answer to “whodunit?” is most often one deviant lawbreaker, in the *Thunderheart* mode. Sometimes, as most often in the American hard-boiled detective tradition, these individual contests of wits play out against the backdrop of a corrupt society; the system is rotten, and many people are on the take. But even tales that offer such a cynical view emphasize doing what’s right and punishing the transgressors the hero can reach rather than fomenting the revolution that might address widespread corruption. To portray justice as individual agents of the law apprehending individual criminals makes it difficult for readers to consider, seriously, larger social forces at play in oppression. Peter Messent notes how the Mystery with its focus on an individual detective has worked to obscure those forces. He sees the Police Procedural with its cooperative law enforcement as an improvement over its predecessor the Pinkerton novel and its “unseen seer” (quoting Dennis Porter) that represents dominant forces: “the real meaning of detection and its relation to the larger social order can be seen more clearly when the links between the detective and the hegemonic order (and the powers of investigation conferred by that order) are revealed without any of the mystification which the private-eye novel introduces” (41). Of course, there is also no guarantee that a crime-solving tale that does not romanticize the individual will do anything to put critical pressure on that larger social order. But Messent’s point about mystification teaches us something about the appeal of Indian detective novels whether those novels feature a lone wolf investigator or an officially-sanctioned team. For all their well-meaning consciousness-raising about injustice, racism, ecological degradation, etc., these novels can support the comforting notion that problems and solutions are individual rather than systemic.

Ginger Strand provides a reading of a highly recognizable popular culture Indian icon as just such a mystification where an emphasis on individual agency and culpability obfuscates governmental and corporate responsibility. Iron Eyes Cody portrayed Indians in many movies, but his most famous role was the “Crying Indian” of the 1971 anti-pollution Public Service Announcement by the Ad Council. Accompanied by drumbeats, an Indian paddles a canoe along a river that turns from candidate for Wild and Scenic River designation to industrial nightmare as the voiceover declares “some people have a deep, abiding respect for the natural beauty that was once this country, and some people don’t.” The Indian lands on a trash-strewn shore, and as a bag of garbage tossed from a passing car lands at his feet, the announcer concludes “people start pollution. People can stop it.” The ad ends with an extreme close-up on the Indian so we can see the one teardrop tracking down his cheek. The PSA did get people to think about litter, but Strand notes two levels of fraud in the message. The Italian-American who recreated himself as Iron Eyes Cody was a fraud, but not an “ill-willed” one: “he . . . supported Indian rights, married an Indian, and adopted Indian children.” Cody choosing to live Indian (or at least his conception of what that entails) suggests a useful theme to bear in mind as we investigate Native American Detective novels; the Mystery has an imperative to mislead readers and, ultimately, uncover deceptions, and Indian Mysteries will often take up questions of authenticity and Indianness like those prompted by Cody’s example. But Strand is most interested in how this PSA’s closing lines put the onus solely on individuals to fix the problems they created through their slovenly behavior. She argues the ad obscures the fact that the Ad Council was an industry-sponsored trade group and that the same businesses funding efforts like the “Keep America Beautiful” campaign and its sad Indian representative had strenuously promoted throw-away consumer culture and resisted legislation to mandate returnable bottles. For Strand, these corporations and

a government compliant to their wishes were much more the culprits when it came to pollution than the individual litterbugs the Ad Council chastised.

I am not suggesting that the wave of Indian detective novels written by non-Indians and launched in the same historical moment as the famous “Crying Indian” ad was consciously a program to deflect public attention away from systematic social injustices and onto the actions of individuals in the way Strand argues the Ad Council creative people calculated the impact of their “Keep America Beautiful” campaign. But those novels’ popularity can contribute to a similar half-conscious attitude toward “Indian” problems and solutions. I put Indian in quotation marks here because a term like “Indian problems” without the quotes suggests the problems are solely the responsibility of Indians or that Indians themselves *are* the problem. True, the Social Protest novel can illuminate such injustices and implicate forces beyond villainous individuals, but overall the novel form itself puts individual actions and reactions at the narrative center. In tracing the intersections of Indian, individuality, and literature, Pfister cites Choctaw and Cherokee novelist and critic Louis Owens’ claim that the novel’s focus on the individual can be at odds with Native sensibilities: “The privileging of the individual necessary for the conception of the modern novel . . . is a more radical departure for American Indian cultures than for the Western world as a whole, for Foucault’s ‘moment of individualization’ represents an experience forced harshly, and rather unsuccessfully, upon Native Americans” (17). Owens’ observation pushes us toward a risky essentialism where all Indians are communal in outlook and the “Western world as a whole” is—ironically—inhabited by like-minded individualists. Pfister resists that essentialist characterization by noting the variety of people labeled Indians: “‘Indians’ were made up of many distinct cultures—‘Indians’ is itself a multicultural category” (26). Of course, even if Owens’ generalization is mostly valid, Indians have been writing novels for many

decades. We can debate whether a more communal worldview marks these novels compared to those produced by non-Natives. But what Indians have *not* been writing, by and large, are detective novels. Native American authors have been reluctant to embrace the Mystery genre and adopt the commercially successful formulas of Hillerman and his many literary descendants. Perhaps it's that individualist focus that runs through the genre even more strongly than in the larger category of the novel; no other genre save perhaps the bildungsroman has such a recognizable individual character type as protagonist. Perhaps it has to do with discomfort over the convention of a linear problem-to-solution plotline, or skepticism over law enforcement or its private counterparts as saviors. Perhaps the writers find importing this specialized form does not facilitate the stories about Indians that they want or need to tell.

Reservations about Indigenous Investigators

In investigating and often critiquing the cultural work these Native American Detective novels perform, especially that overwhelming majority written by cultural outsiders, I do not call for pressure on non-Indian writers to cease inventing Indian characters or for a readers' boycott to end colonial exploitation by the dominant culture. Such would be political actions that Ward Churchill would approve, judging from his blast against Hillerman, the subgenre's most famous practitioner, and I can certainly understand his (pun intended) reservations about such fictions. But it would be a more boring world if writers could not cross boundaries of culture, race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, class, etc. to create their characters, and it is probably impossible not to cross such boundaries. But while literature *can* move us toward understanding across such boundaries, we have good reason to scrutinize Indian Detective novels written by cultural outsiders, demand some attempt at engagement with living cultures in such crossings, and call artists out when it is missing.

Like other critics who regard with suspicion white artistic license to write from the perspectives of people of color, Beth Loffreda and Claudia Rankine blow the whistle on white writers imaginatively inhabiting characters of color and then defending what Loffreda and Rankine see as cultural trespass with arguments about artistic rights. Such arguments, according to Loffreda and Rankine, run as follows: “The imagination is a free space, and I have the right to imagine from the point of view of anyone I want—it is against the nature of art itself to place limits on who or what I can imagine.” Loffreda and Rankine’s composite of the aggrieved white writer sounds accurate, especially in light of my own call above for the imagination unfettered. They claim that “this language of rights is as extraordinary as it is popular,” and their use of the first-person pronoun three times in that brief declaration by a generic white artist underlines how far such thinking strays from values of communal responsibility (15).

A chastened or at least ruffled white poet or novelist (if I may imaginatively inhabit her or his point of view) might reply to Loffreda and Rankine, perhaps accompanied with an exasperated eye roll: “So, how *should* I go about writing characters of color? Or am I just forbidden from doing so?” The first question shoves too much of the work of addressing racial injustice onto people of color, a move bitinglly satirized by the last line of Gwen Nell Westerman’s “Dakota Homecoming”:

We are so honored that

you are here, they said.

We know that this is

your homeland, they said.

The admission price

is five dollars, they said.

Here is your button

for the event, they said.

It means so much to us that

you are here, they said.

We want to write

an apology letter, they said.

Tell us what to say.

Listening to people whose culture one wishes to/insists on representing does not mean expecting to be handed the answers to the test.

Loffreda and Rankine respond to that prickly second question from my imagined white artist by redirecting the discussion onto the artist's motivation:

Are we saying Asian writers can't write Latino characters? That white writers can't write black characters? That no one can write from a different racial other's point of view?

We're saying we'd like to change the terms of that conversation, to think about creativity and the imagination without employing the language of rights and the sometimes concealing terms of craft. (17)

Loffreda and Rankine call for artists to ask why they want to write across such cultural boundaries, "what is the charisma of what I feel estranged from, and why might I wish to enter and inhabit it." They insist we "speak not in terms of prohibition and rights, but desire" (17-8). By putting the onus on these artists to consider how desire shapes their choices, Loffreda and Rankine push the discussion away from debates on censorship and toward questions of the cultural work their art performs.

In his study of the minstrel show, Lott engages such questions about cultural appropriation and desire, both producers' and consumers' desires. He casts blackface minstrelsy as "a principal site of struggle in and over the culture of black people. This struggle took place largely among antebellum whites, of course, and it finally divested black people of control over elements of their culture and over their own cultural representation generally." For Lott, the minstrel show before the Civil War is a "dialectical flickering of racial insult and racial envy, [with] moments of domination and moments of liberation, counterfeit and currency, a pattern at times amounting to no more than the two faces of racism, at others, gesturing toward a specific kind of political or sexual danger, and all constituting a peculiarly American structure of racial feeling" (18). I can only aspire to achieve such insight into the cultural work of Indian Detective novels. We certainly cannot count on non-Indian writers of Indian Mysteries to provide it. I see little evidence that they have engaged deeply in the self-interrogation Loffreda and Rankine demand.

The Indian Detective novels by non-Indians I have read range in tone from grave to breezy and lightly comical, but none holds its protagonist up for ridicule like the minstrel show with its racist caricatures. Whether these outsiders mean for their fictions to be respectful toward Indian culture or do not fret over or even consider their reception by Natives, Indians, like black artists and political leaders who condemned the minstrel show, will not be divested of their "control over elements of their culture and over their own cultural representation." Along with Alexie's disdain in *Indian Killer* for his character Jack Wilson, a white purveyor of Indian Mysteries who fabricates his own Native lineage, other Indian writers contest what they deem cultural intrusions. Saad Bee Hózhó, the Diné Writers' Collective, take an indigenous writer to

task for misrepresenting Navajo culture. Of Rebecca Roanhorse and her novel *Trail of Lightning* (2018), they cite gross mischaracterizations of Navajo ways and argue

Because Ms. Roanhorse is not of Diné ancestry, she does not have the authority or experience to write about our people and culture. To do so is cultural appropriation, the act of taking and using things from a culture that is not your own.

To an audience uneducated in Native American history, it might be easy to conflate one Native identity (Roanhorse's Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo background) with another (Navajo identity).

And they note that novels like *Trail of Lightning* are not a new problem: "There are other examples of literary appropriation of our culture by non-Navajos. Notably Tony Hillerman and his 'mystery' books that appropriated and continue to profit off Navajo culture and stories without shame—all while portraying us inaccurately." The Collective worry that Roanhorse's novel "is becoming widely read and reviewed" and urge readers to seek out the work of actual Navajos.

As a critic, I want to understand the representations of Indianness these detective novels offer, whatever their accuracy or inaccuracy, and my critical attention is not an endorsement. Considering what is appropriation gets complicated because what counts as cultural "sensitivity" and who gets to make that judgment are not always simple matters, easier calls like *Trail of Lightning* notwithstanding. Nor sometimes is determining which writers are outsiders. For example, Martin Cruz Smith, best known for his later Arkady Renko thrillers like *Gorky Park* set in the U.S.S.R., wrote an alternative history called *The Indians Won* (1970) and had his first bestseller with *Nightwing* (1977), a horror story featuring vampire bats terrorizing a Southwest Indian community, interesting for our purposes because Indian lawman Youngman Duran is on

the case. Cruz on his official website does not mention anything about his Indian lineage, but one biography notes that “his mother, Louise Smith, was a jazz singer and Pueblo Indian rights leader” (“Smith”). Although on his website Cruz mentions childhood memories of his jazz pianist father performing at an Albuquerque bar, he was mostly raised in the East, and I can find no record of him living amongst his mother’s people. Certainly, many people are likewise not so tightly connected to the cultures of their ancestors, but they aren’t necessarily producing fiction about those cultures and asking for or receiving credibility as interpreters of those cultures.

Peter G. Beidler provides a litany of *Nightwing*’s factual errors about Native American peoples, cultures, and religions, as well as the basic geography of its setting. He writes “one can forgive, perhaps, the hard-cover jacket blurb for declaring that Smith ‘comes naturally by his interest in the American Southwest and its Indians, for he is one-half Pueblo’” (155), but Beidler is more concerned about the special knowledge of Indian life that mainstream reviewers have attributed to Smith because of his ethnicity. Beidler acknowledges that “fiction is, after all, fiction, and we must grant to literary artists the right to select, alter, and invent facts in such a way as to suit the needs of their art,” but he believes the misrepresentations in *Nightwing* are the product of ignorance rather than artistic design (157). Accuracy, Beidler argues, should be a greater responsibility for the writer telling stories about Indians:

It is unfortunate . . . in a nation in which most people learn about American Indians through fiction and film, that a story which will be so widely disseminated does not reflect more accurately the truth about the Indians it portrays. It is doubly unfortunate that, because the author of *Nightwing* is himself Indian, readers will assume—especially when encouraged to do so by reviewers of the novel—that *this* is what contemporary Indians are really like. (158)

There's a healthy debate to be continued about novelists' duties to the cultures of the characters they create. I do agree with Beidler when he puts a higher premium on accuracy for texts about people from a non-dominant culture when written by a member of the dominant culture and primarily for members of that culture; the "it's just a tale of vampire bats run amok" defense (and I'm not suggesting Smith ever felt the need to reply to Beidler's criticisms) should not exonerate Smith, who does not closely know the cultures he represents as an insider or even, according to Beidler's fact-checking, as a close observer.

Like Youngman Durant, the overwhelming majority of fictional Indian detectives are invented by cultural outsiders. Given the long history of appropriation of Indian images from Shakespeare's Caliban through the Boston Tea Party and the Ad Council's "Crying Indian" and continuing today, this mini-boom in the Native American Mystery novel subgenre and elevation of the Indian detective character to a type if not an archetype deserve scrutiny. Why has the Indian become the sheriff, and why, despite precursors for at least *eight* decades, did this subgenre gain momentum in the early 1970s?

To consider such questions, I will analyze many more texts written by non-Indians than Indians, so the danger is that Native Americans, so often spoken *about* or spoken *for*, will be rendered nearly voiceless simply by the choice of topic, Indian Detective novels. I will discuss how Indian writers have used, resisted, or adapted the Mystery genre, but will not exclude any novels based on a writer's ethnicity. Besides a fair amount of commentary on Hillerman's series, these Indian detective novels by non-Indians have largely escaped critical attention, perhaps because they don't fit into the category "Native American Literature," but there is much we can learn about America's curiosities, anxieties, and submerged wishes about Indians by examining a representative sample of this subgenre.

I am concerned that so many of these popular culture texts that feature Indian characters are Detective novels, and not because the Mystery and, indeed, the novel itself are not indigenous forms—artists from many cultures have successfully deployed both the novel and the Mystery genre for many different aesthetic and political purposes—nor because I am hostile toward the genre. What does concern me is the body count. I don't plan to wade into the conversations over violent entertainments and their influence on consumers, but it should be alarming that so many of us meet fictional Indians through a genre that by definition begins its narratives with a murder. Many Indians endure violence and crime, and some perpetrate them, so I am not calling for uplifting fairy tales that dodge social justice questions to replace these morality plays about justice. It's just that the victims, Native or non-Native, rather than being fully human characters whose loss we are encouraged to mourn, usually serve merely as opportunities for the protagonists to display their wits and bravery. On the one hand, I wonder about the cumulative effect of all these fictional deaths in "Indian Country"; on the other, I wonder if the individual examples create any empathy for the survivors and their grief. Again, we can debate whether a novelist ought to be responsible for doing so, but these Native American Detective Novels are probably anesthetizing readers against real-world violence even when they include speeches about social justice and cultural dignity.

As I contextualize the emergence and growth of the fictional Indian detective historically and interpret individual examples, two closely related questions, among many others, particularly interest me. Again, why this moment of the 1970s for the successful launch of a new type of protagonist, one with literary and real-world forebears, but little prior purchase on the public imagination? And what cultural work is this subgenre doing? The Mystery novel is but one vehicle in the service of a long project to make Indians legible to the broader public. With the

civil rights and anti-war activism of the 1960s, the Western's mythmaking power began to wane, and the Mystery stepped in with a way to tell contemporary stories about Indians (something mostly off-limits to the nostalgic Western), seize Indians from the clutches of the 60s counterculture, enlist them in the fight for "Law and Order," and ideally accommodate those conflicting dual impulses the mainstream society feels toward Native Americans, assimilation and exoticism. Non-Indian writers, spurred by sales figures, genuine curiosity about Native cultures, and/or a general liberal push toward multiculturalism, invented a surprisingly large cadre of Native American sleuths patrolling the literary landscape. Indigenous writers have mostly avoided contributing to the wave of Indian Detective novels, or tend to approach the subgenre with wariness, irony, or downright hostility.

Chapter Two

The Indian Becomes the Sheriff

Most people with any opinion on the matter, perhaps even many with an interest in popular culture representations of Indians, believe Tony Hillerman invented the fictional Native American detective with his Joe Leaphorn character in the 1970s (to be joined by the younger Jim Chee in 1980). Those people are wrong by at least ninety years, but it is not surprising that earlier attempts to market the Indian investigator faded from public memory; despite moderate successes, they never connected with readers and built a loyal fan base like Hillerman's Navajo detective series. The Leaphorn and Chee novels' popularity has much to do with Hillerman's skills composing entertaining and enthralling mysteries and gauging how to satisfy his audience and keep them desiring more episodes, but also much to do with broader cultural shifts as Americans questioned, among a host of assumptions, master narratives like the Western, which cast Indians as antagonists to civilization. In the next chapter, I will examine attempts before Hillerman to establish Indian detective characters in a series, both in print and on television, and discuss what changed in American culture during the 60s and 70s that provided fertile ground for Leaphorn and Chee while those earlier attempts bloomed but briefly. In this chapter, I will acknowledge other forerunners to Hillerman's duo who appeared in a single text or only a few short stories and consider these early incarnations in detail, for many of the conflicts and themes developed by later writers already animate these first Native sleuths. I will show how the "pioneering" purveyors of fictional Indian detectives riffed on existing prototypes in popular culture and literature, and how they each situated their protagonists differently between the poles of assimilationism and exoticism in the Dialectic of Diversity. These largely forgotten fictions

signal the beginnings of a major but mostly unremarked shift: the Indian, once routinely presented by popular culture as the impediment to justice, has become the instrument of justice.

From the start of the twentieth century into the 1960s, popular culture located Indians almost exclusively in two places: “the West” and the children’s imaginary. Both settings pushed Indians into the past tense. Disney’s movie version of *Peter Pan* (1953), for example, may have supplied a generation of children with as powerful ideas about Indians as did the Lone Ranger or Davey Crockett. Indians, like pirates and boys who refuse to grow up, exist in an arrested pre-adult stage in *Peter Pan*’s “Neverland”; children envy Indians’ freedom and are encouraged to play Indian until it is time to move onward to adulthood and the civilized, restricted behavior it requires. And the stories America told about its own adolescence likewise relegated Indians to the past. Westerns rehearsed the mythology of progress and conquest, sometimes with a tear shed for the vanquished and nostalgia for the lost freedoms of the frontier, but rarely any consideration of Native Americans’ place in the resulting new order.

Some prototypes for the sleuths of Hillerman et al come directly from the Western genre. Gina MacDonald and Andrew MacDonald note a scattering of titles among 1880s dime novels, such as Judson R. Taylor’s *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective: A Tale of Startling Mysteries* (1882), that offered Indian characters using their special Indian skills to solve mysteries, usually in Western settings (2). MacDonald and MacDonald argue that an Indian literary character in a detective role might be a more natural fit than at first it may seem. They cite “similarities in function” between the detective and the legendary Indian scout or tracker:

Both put themselves out for hire, usually to people who consider themselves their social superiors. Both work in potentially compromising situations, sometimes against the interests of the people from whom they sprang (in the classic detective

story, the working classes, the common folk) and in favor of employers far more wealthy and powerful. Both scout and detective interpret alien cultures, ways, and in the case of Indians, languages. Both are classic middlemen, reconciling different cultural agendas. (3-4)

Muscogee Creek and Cherokee Tom Holm's Cherokee detective Hoolie Smith in *The Osage Rose* (2008) validates this similarity: "Hoolie felt that, as a detective, it was his duty to protect people from evil and danger. Detectives should be like the old-time scouts; they should be able to find the enemy before he finds the people" (106). For Hoolie, however, an "old-time scout" served "the people" rather than negotiating the spaces between *peoples*. Still, MacDonald and MacDonald's and Holm's connection between detectives and scouts will prove useful when we turn in Chapter Four to Hillerman's Navajo policemen, and even more when we examine their early competitors, Brian Garfield's Sam Watchman and Richard Martin Stern's Johnny Ortiz.

Phil Scott Saves Gentry from Gypsies, Becomes Worthy of Lucy's Hand

The aforementioned Phil Scott, perhaps the earliest Native American detective character, reads signs of a crime with the acuity of those celebrated Indian scouts, or of another progenitor, Edgar Allan Poe's Monsieur Dupin. Phil Scott, rather than working for his Indian "people" (he has both Indian and white forebears) or functioning as an intermediary between them and the rest of society (there are no other Indian characters in his story), serves the social group he would like to join: Scott braves the warrens of the underclass to reunite an aristocratic white family and restore their security and reputation. Phil Scott was created by "Judson R. Taylor," a pseudonym for Harlan P. Halsey, as 150 pages of 1890 New York Supreme Court proceedings eventually concluded in wrangling over whether Halsey or his publishers held rights to that name (New

York Supreme Court). Taylor's *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective: A Tale of Startling Mysteries* (1882) was #318 in the Butler Brothers "Electric Series," electric surely signifying cutting edge, as something like "Atomic Comics" would appeal to forward-looking teens in the 1950s, and Cyber-*anything* was cool in the 1980s. The "Electric Series" catalogue at the end of the novel starts at #300 but runs all the way to #559, so there was plenty of room for variations on a theme. 20 of the first 22 titles riff on the same pattern as *Phil Scott*, including *Abner Ferret, the Lawyer Detective*; *Allen Keene, the War Detective*; *Clarice Dyke, the Female Detective*; *Helen Elwood, the Female Detective*; *Fritz, the German Detective*; *Victor Maury, the French Detective*; *Nat Foster, the Boston Detective*; and *Walt Wheeler, the Scout Detective*. This 1880s-style diversity was certainly born out of market forces rather than any desire for a more just range of literary representations, unlike the call for multiculturalism in more recent decades that has benefitted sellers of non-white, non-male, or non-straight detective fictions. The pressure these dime novelists faced to churn out content makes a genre template like the Mystery extra convenient, resulting in this startlingly varied menu of detective options. Regardless of the motives for their creation, these Electric Series detective novels are groundbreaking in their assortment of protagonists, even if, as evidenced by Phil Scott's "startling" tale, they rely on familiar elements of the Gothic (dark, claustrophobia-inducing passageways, screams, and blood) and the Melodrama (long-lost twins, disguises, false accusations, cliffhangers, and stunning reversals of fortune). When Scott picks up a trail, the delightfully hyperventilating prose suggests Taylor's Gothic and Melodramatic sources: "Blood! blood! and mystery and murder seemed to be declared at every step" (108).

None of the detective authors is listed in the Electric Series catalogue (unlike the authors of some of the other books), but there were definitely writers contributing multiple titles like

Judson R. Taylor/Harlan P. Halsey, who must not have specialized in Indian subject matter since he also penned *Macon Moore, the Southern Detective* (1881) for Butler Brothers. A 1904 edition of Nick Carter's *Beyond Pursuit; or, The Yellow Cab Mystery* includes a catalogue for "The Magnet Library Of Fascinating Detective Stories" that lists Judson R. Taylor as the author of two other titles in the earlier "Electric Series"—*Fritz, the German Detective* and *Gipsy* (spelled "Gypsy" in the Magnet catalogue) *Blair, the Western Detective*—as well as mysteries not offered by Electric: *Old Stonewall, Detective*; *Bruce Angelo, the City Detective*; *Van, the Government Detective*; and *The Masked Detective*. The capitalized banner "PUBLISHED EVERY WEEK" under the "Magnet Library" title shows how fast these texts were produced and consumed in the years before cinema conquered popular entertainment (Carter).

Taylor's Phil Scott certainly brings the tracking skills MacDonal and MacDonal note in these early Indian detective prototypes. Scott is called a "sleuth-hound" several times by himself and other characters; indeed, he spends a good portion of the novel snuffling along the ground on all fours seeking the trail and searching for "clews." The narrator attributes some of Scott's ability to his professional training. Marion Bramley has apparently been murdered, so her father requests that a "great private detective bureau" (25) in the city dispatch an investigator. The narrator informs us that Mr. Bramley "appeared to base all his hopes on the skill of a member of that wonderful fraternity, who could read columns in a footprint, and trail evidences seemingly invisible to ordinary eyes" (26). But Scott's prowess as a tracker also derives from the Indian half of his heritage, which puts him more in tune with his surroundings. A plethora of animal associations underline Scott's closeness to nature. Besides a sleuth-hound, he is variously compared to "a snake moving through the long grass" (39), "a creeping panther" (63), and "a fox [turning] on his track" (88). Scott also creeps from the attic of a disreputable tavern

“with the noiseless movement of an earth-worm” (88), and, in a combined canine and feline analogy, he discovers a man’s trail and “dogged his steps with the noiseless patience of a cat on the scent of its prey” (60). The Scott nose is not just metaphorically remarkable, as we see in this exchange with Mr. Bramley concerning Marion’s relative Lucy:

“This Miss Lucy Lavournais is a decided blonde?”

“You have seen her?”

“Never.”

“How do you know?”

“Well, I scent a description of her in the air.” (34)

Few if any of MacDonald and MacDonald’s legendary trackers could top such an olfactory feat.

Scott’s capabilities are not all linked with the animal kingdom, and their Indian source is not always so easy to discern. Scott leads Gypsy pursuers into a trap through his superior topographical knowledge: “The Indian knew every foot of the ground, and led the way toward a point where he could carry out the little game he had in view” (115). Later Scott needs his trusty dog Dash to lead him to the conspirators in their abandoned mine hideout, so he has the dog ride piggyback as he clammers down a mineshaft:

The well-trained hound was led to grasp his great paws around the Indian’s neck as a child would clasp its mother.

Thus the Indian, with his hound upon his shoulders, made the perilous descent by means of the framework in the shaft, which at any instant was liable to give way and precipitate them to the bottom. (125)

Fortunately for him, after the criminals are bested, Scott does not have to pack his dog back up the mineshaft: “The detective knew of a passage from the mine different from the one by which

he had entered, and in a few hours the party arrived in sight of the Bramley mansion” (132). The narrator gives no explanation for how Scott has arrived at his familiarity with these settings and no indication that Scott has ever been in this neighborhood prior to Mr. Bramley’s summons. Perhaps it just seemed common sense that the Indian Detective would know his way around, permitting the plot to chug along without bothersome exposition.

It was also apparently common knowledge that an Indian would not reveal his or her emotions. Scott shields his own thoughts behind a face usually “fixed and stoical” (133)—at least we get to the last four pages of the novel before this predictable adjective stoical appears—but sees into other people’s minds and hearts: “the Indian detective possessed a remarkable faculty for the reading of the human face.” His Indian heritage only indirectly leads Scott to develop this power:

His white blood had bred within him all the instincts of a man of high honor and keen intelligence, while his red blood had made him a sort of outcast from the society of his father’s race.

The latter fact had driven him within himself, and had made him a close student of nature and humanity. (40)

This brief observation is a complicated mess of nature versus nurture, but the narrator does try to account for Scott’s “faculty” through experience rather than just ascribing a racial origin (notwithstanding his white instinct to high honor and keen intelligence!).

The narrator does not spell out the source of another of Scott’s talents but alludes to its Indian origins. When Scott confuses a gang of bad guys by throwing his voice, the narrator informs us that “the Indian was to a certain extent a natural ventriloquist” (86). Scott is routinely called “the Indian,” but even with the qualification “to a certain extent,” the juxtaposition of the

“the Indian” and “natural” can lead a reader to recall the cliché of Indians mimicking bird calls, etc.

Whether Scott owes his tracking, orienteering, face-reading, or ventriloquism to his Indian mother, his experiences as an outsider in a white culture, or individual talent and hard work, the novel makes it clear what part of his makeup *cannot* be traced to his Indian ancestry:

He combined all the best traits and characteristics of the two races from which he was descended.

He had many of the physical traits of his mother’s race, combined with the intelligence and mental superiority of his father’s. (39)

Though other characters hold the detective in high regard—Marion’s intended Wesley Fitch “gazed on the clear-cut features of the Indian, [and] saw an expression of intelligence that seemed almost superhuman” (58) and thinks this “extraordinary and wonderful man” is “his superior both mentally and physically” (53)—Scott knows the score when it comes to the social hierarchy. His appearance marks him as lower caste. Mr. Bramley’s man, sent to intercept the incoming investigator at the train station, fails to detect the detective: “When the servant came from watching the arrival of the last train, he announced that the only passenger was a darkey or an Indian tramp” (27). Scott makes his way to the manor and is only accepted as a detective when he produces a voucher letter written in a hand Mr. Bramley recognizes as the agency chief’s. Scott spends the rest of the novel proving his worth to Bramley and family through melodramatic complications such as Bramley accusing Scott of helping Wesley Fitch conceal his murder of Bramley’s daughter. Even the narrator at one point seems to forget whose story he is telling and thus undermines Scott’s role. The novel refers to Scott as “our hero” several times, but once seems to lose track of its protagonist when Wesley takes over that title: “Our hero’s

father had been a clergyman of moderate means. Wesley was his only son” (50). The conventions of the Melodrama would likely put the wrongly accused suitor at the center of this text, but after this lapse in concentration, the novel soon returns the spotlight to the detective.

“Our hero” Phil Scott performs some gallantries usually reserved for the Wesley Fitches of the world and not Indian characters. Rather than the threat to white femaledom, Scott is its protector. When he rescues Lucy’s long-lost cousin Amelia and the very much alive Marion from the mine, Amelia exclaims: “Marion, we are saved! It is the detective!” (132). Upon returning to the Bramley mansion, “some one [sic] suddenly asked: ‘Where is the Indian? Where is our benefactor?’” (134). But the Bramleys’ hero has vanished for six months (but only one quarter of a page). The Indian has been recast as the savior of the white social order rather than a threat to it, and even protects the upper class from the devious schemes of the lower.

The novel’s sole Indian character does not terrorize white women or work to destroy “civilization.” Those narrative functions, however, get displaced onto another group, Gypsies. Mr. Bramley realized that a band of Gypsies must be “encamped” nearby when he saw his daughter Marion talking to an old Gypsy woman three weeks before her supposed murder (31), and Scott later reveals that another unsolved murder was attributed to the Gypsies (109-10). Several members of this nomadic band are hired as assassins in a plot to disrupt the orderly transmission of Mr. Bramley’s wealth to his legitimate heirs. A Gypsy captured by Scott speaks a brand of pidgin English often associated with Indian characters: “Ha! Injun policeman!”; “Gypsy go along all quiet!” (117). And the Gypsies even substitute for the customary Indians in a captivity narrative; Lucy’s twin “had been stolen by gypsies” (133). *Phil Scott* moves an Indian character into the protagonist slot but has another Other, the Gypsies, cover the customary Indian narrative functions.

Though Scott is certain he is superior to any mere Gypsy—he boasts to Wesley that “I could deal with a hundred gypsies” (114)—he is decidedly more humble in gauging his social station relative to the Bramley clan. Six months after saving the Bramley women, he returns “in the uniform of a common soldier” to secure a promise from Lucy. He is not interested in money from Mr. Bramley for a job well done. Instead he seeks the reward of Lucy’s hand: “Lucy Lavournais, I am not your equal; the blood of the red man of the forest runs in my veins, but still I love you; shall my reward be your love? I ask no more” (135). Still, he imposes preconditions to marriage upon himself; he vows that he will return with stars on his uniform from the “great American rebellion” (134) or die trying. And four years (and one page) later, the pair marries at the Bramley mansion:

Phillip Scott had returned with the stars upon his shoulders, and Lucy Lavournais wedded a general in the army of the United States.

The faithful detective had proved a brilliant soldier, and in our American army had won a soldier’s reward—honor, rank, glory! (136)

It is startling to discover a nineteenth-century novel that concludes with a “half-breed” Indian man marrying a white woman. The logic of the Melodrama insists that “our hero” get married at the tale’s conclusion, but this novel goes through extraordinary maneuvers in its final two pages to make this liaison palatable to white readers. Of course, the happily ever after conclusion blocks consideration of how this marriage will fare or what challenges any children might face. Still, Scott’s successes are refreshing against a backdrop of tragic literary Indians. Those unusual successes, however, will echo in later versions of the Indian detective. His ultimate assimilation into white structures of authority (a detective, and then a general, and even a husband to the aristocratic Lucy) points the way for most later Native American literary sleuths,

who either operate within or cooperate with police forces. These fictions serve the comforting notion that the “faithful” Indian man will fit himself into the legal and social systems of the dominant culture. Any threat a strong Indian character might pose to the dominant social order will be contained as these detectives achieve “honor, rank, glory” within police institutions.

Scundoo, Shaman Shamus

A different sort of precursor for more recent literary Indian detectives lives a world away from the Bramley mansion and the society it represents. Rather than a middleman working the margins of two cultures, as Gina MacDonald and Andrew MacDonald characterize the scout (3-4), or an advance guard ranging afar and returning, as Tom Holm’s Hoolie Smith suggests (106), another forerunner of Sam Watchman, Johnny Ortiz, et al operates at the very center of his culture. Mike Grost cites Jack London’s 1902 tale “The Master of Mystery” as “the prototype of stories involving mystery, intrigue and conflict among members of a ‘primitive’ tribe,” in this case Alaska’s Tlingit (spelled “Thlinget” by London). Scundoo the shaman is detective *and* trickster: he fools a much younger and much larger rival shaman from another band into humiliating himself and pins the blame for a theft of valuable blankets on the resident skeptic about all things shamanic. Scundoo’s method is a curious mix of ascertaining guilt through magic (which in hindsight is probably just a shrewd piece of psychology) and logic. He puts “Jelchs, the Raven, diviner—diviner of mystery and seer of things” in a room with a pot and instructs his people “one by one shall ye go into the house, lay hand upon the pot for the space of one long intake of breath, and withdraw again. Doubtless Jelchs will make outcry when the hand of the evil-doer is nigh” (392). After everyone has entered and left the room with nary a squawk from the bird, Scundoo quickly makes all raise their hands high and only the skeptic Sime’s hand

is not besmirched with soot from the pot. The crowd turns on Sime, and Scundoo retrieves his raven and retires wrapped in his reward, the blankets. This shaman-as-detective figure would reappear in several later mysteries. Cherokee writer Mardi Oakley Medawar's Tay-bodal uses science (which seems magical to his peers) to apprehend a murderer in *Death at Rainy Mountain* (1998), Terry La Ban's *Muktuk Wolfsbreath, Hard Boiled Shaman: The Spirit of Boo: A Graphic Novel* (2012) features a Siberian shaman using magic to solve supernatural crimes, and J. M. Hayes's "Spirit Man" Raven catches a killer among a Paleolithic band in *The Spirit and the Skull* (2014).

Eagels (Private) Eye

The Mystery genre itself provides a third model for an Indian detective in addition to the scout or shaman. When MacDonald and MacDonald observe that, like scouts, detectives work "sometimes against the interests of the people from whom they sprang (in the classic detective story, the working classes, the common folk) and in favor of employers far more wealthy and powerful" (4), they seem to allude to the hard-boiled school's streetwise gumshoe, though many detectives in what is more commonly named the classic tradition have aristocratic backgrounds, such as Edgar Allan Poe's Monsieur Dupin, or Arthur Conan Doyle's emblematic Sherlock Holmes. Phil Scott plainly fits this private eye model as well as drawing on the tracker/scout figure, but while Scott rises from common stock to take his place in the councils of generals and the arms of the wealthy, the next Indian detective protagonist of a full-length novel after that initial wave of nineteenth-century dime novels MacDonald and MacDonald note, Eagels, descends from well-heeled Indian royalty though he also works as a detective for hire. Ian

Alexander not only unabashedly casts his character Eagels in the Holmes mode, he even has Eagels recall meeting the famous sleuth and consciously mimic his investigative techniques.

Steve Lewis recognizes Ian Alexander's *The Disappearance of Archibald Forsyth* (1933) as the first modern Mystery novel with an Indian detective, and cites a great many later texts featuring such protagonists on his useful webpage "Native American Detectives—A Chronological Checklist compiled by Steve Lewis." "Ian Alexander" is a pen name for Alexander Knox (1907-1995), a Canadian writer primarily known for his acting career. Knox was born in Strathroy, Ontario and moved to London, England, the setting of *The Disappearance of Archibald Forsyth*, in the 1930s. His detective Eagels served in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and then sets up shop as a private investigator in London, working closely with Scotland Yard. Not much truly distinguishes Eagels from other fictional sleuths of the era, for his signs of Indianness are rather superficial.

Eagels lives in two cultures, Indian and European, but with none of the anxieties so common in later treatments of this theme. The narrator explains that Eagels's "father had been a chief of the Iroquois, had done well in Canada"—"well" meaning, presumably, financially—"and given his son an excellent education along the lines of the white men he saw about him, but he had not neglected to give him the keys to the great storehouse of the knowledge of his own race" (12). Despite the specificity of indicating his Iroquois origins (diluted by the fact that six different nations comprised the Iroquois Confederacy), Eagels is an Indian stereotype. The Scotland Yard man Conway, himself a stereotype of the conventional-minded foil for the brilliant investigator, notes the stoic countenance Eagels presents toward others: "Conway could not help thinking that Eagels was getting far more out of this conversation than he was. He watched the face of the Indian carefully for any indication, but the mask could not be penetrated"

(35). Indeed, Eagels is “*the Indian*,” an inscrutable figure. Stock characters surely did not receive the critical skewering in the 1930s that they would today, especially in a genre elevating plot above characterization. Eagels’ wise-cracking assistant Millicent Doe is just as much a stereotype, the sassy and brassy young woman proffered by Hollywood: “They were odd companions. The perky, rather hard American girl, bred on the Broadway booze racket, efficient, capable, terse, emotionless, and the Indian, inheritor of a vanishing race” (21).

Eagels displays a playful attitude about his status as “the Indian”; when Conway remarks he “thought you’d come nosing in” to the case, “Eagels flashed his rare smile. ‘Heap trouble all ’bout one family,’ he mocked” (27). When Eagels counsels against paying to silence a butler who has eavesdropped on a sensitive conversation, he imparts the supposedly Native wisdom “that a bribe to keep his mouth shut would only open it wider. Old proverb: ‘Mouth shut with wampum will open with more’” (97). But not all the references to Eagels’s heritage are played for laughs. The narrator informs us that

Eagels was a man who knew his limitations. He also knew the limitations of his race. He knew that there were times when he would prefer to dream than act, to sit in the sun and feel the freshness of the wind, rather than to create an empire, but he also knew the virtues of his race, its endurance, its patience, its hidden strength. (135)

We can appreciate the attempt to balance pros against cons in the old essentialist “racial characteristics” fashion, but this is a generic and romantic contrast between industrious Europeans and dreamy, inactive Indians in tune with nature. This kind of logic persists right through until the present with mixed-race characters drawing stock aspects of their character from supposedly genetic/cultural sources. To illustrate his Indian-derived endurance, patience, and hidden strength, Eagels goes into a reverie about his education in the schoolhouse of nature:

As he sat in Hastings Place he remembered his earlier experiences. How he had selected a red buck with velvet budding antlers in the early summer. He had followed him through August, up the Laurentian slopes, through the valleys of great and quite uncharted rivers, round the borders of lakes—all August he was on the chase with nothing but his knife, a hatchet and a few matches. (136)

If Eagels is inscrutable to other characters, we readers are privy in select moments like this one to his innermost thoughts. Eagels applies this metaphor of hunting to the case at hand set in the charted streets of London. But despite the Indian trimmings such as this flashback about deer-hunting, this Mystery stays wholly within the Sherlock Holmes tradition. The solution, in true Holmesian fashion, involves such minutiae as Eagels noticing whether the victim tucked his laces into his shoes as he slipped them off and put on another pair to practice on a church's pipe organ, and the criminal dons a disguise reminiscent of the deception in Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891). Eagels even credits Sherlock Holmes for his investigative technique: "Conway might go to the house with a preconceived theory, but he wouldn't. With this fact fixed in his mind, the complete refusal to theorize in advance which he had learned from Holmes himself the only time he had met him, Eagels listened to the conversation of others" (73).

Knox's attempt to write an Indian Sherlock Holmes must have met with enough success that he followed up *The Disappearance of Archibald Forsyth* with *Murder in Public* (1934), featuring another Indian detective named Falcon, also operating in London. It is perhaps not surprising that Knox used a different pen name, "John Crozier," for this second ornithologically-named protagonist's Mystery; it sounds like a clone of the previous novel. This time the detective is the son of a Delaware chief (Lilley). According to a review by William F. Deeck,

“acquainted with Sherlock Holmes, Falcon emulates to some extent the Master in his own investigations.” And he even has a female American sidekick: “Working with Scotland Yard and Miss Mitt, his office assistant who is as American as the author can make her, Falcon breaks up a gang of dope dealers.” Knox deserves credit for reintroducing Indian detective characters into the Mystery genre, but apparently the reading public was not clamoring for novels about this “new” type of sleuth. In the next two decades, two writers would, however, offer Indian detectives in short stories set not in Holmes’s London but in fictitious versions of Indian country. For the first time besides Jack London’s Scundoo, Indian detectives would patrol their home turf rather than ranging far afield to save the white gentry.

The Return of the Native

Better known for his horror and fantasy pulp fiction, Manly Wade Wellman made a reasonably big splash in 1946 with “A Star for a Warrior” in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*: the story won the magazine’s first annual short story prize, besting an entry from William Faulkner, much to Faulkner’s chagrin. Unaware of Knox’s two 1930s novels (which suggests their limited impact) or Taylor’s and London’s much earlier Indian detective tales, the contest’s judges credited Wellman’s story’s novelty: “It’s [sic] originality is twofold: it introduces not only a new detective character, but a new type of detective character; and it places this new type of detective against a background hitherto unexploited in the field of crime fiction. The detective is named David Return, and he is a full-blooded American Indian” (qtd. in Rickert). Jeremiah Rickert offers high praise for this practitioner of pulp: “Manly Wade Wellman wrote for a living in a time when you were paid by the word, and often quantity was more important than quality[;] however[,] of the dozens of stories of his that I’ve read, very few struck me as rush-jobs or

filler.” The David Return stories support that judgment: they efficiently establish setting and a limited cast of characters and keep the plot moving along crisply while allowing just enough room for description, dialogue, the narrator’s exposition, and the detective’s interior cogitations. And they are, for neat little puzzles, quite suggestive of broader social concerns. The few David Return short stories are worth considering closely both for themselves and because they model in miniature many of the themes Native American detective novels will continue to explore more than half a century later.

The opening scene of “A Star for a Warrior,” before introducing any hint of the mystery plot, offers a fascinating little drama springing from the meeting between the Mystery genre and that “hitherto unexploited” (an unfortunate word choice to modern eyes) Native American milieu. The title “A Star for a Warrior” reveals its protagonist’s hybrid nature when we realize two paragraphs in that the star is a silver star our new tribal policeman will begin wearing, combining the sheriff and the Indian warrior. Return may be a “new type of detective character,” but his motivation at the story’s opening is instantly and perhaps universally recognizable: he is the excited newbie, a police recruit about to be knocked down a peg or two by his superior, in this case his grandfather and “senior lieutenant of the agency police” Tough Feather (4). Still, Return *is* an Indian, a member of an invented tribe called the Tsuchah, so readers will expect his difference from whites to be marked. The story satisfies both impulses of the “Dialectic of Diversity” in the very first paragraph: “once he lifted [his sombrero] and slapped his thigh with it, in exultation too great for even an Indian to dissemble” (4). Here the story handles assimilation and exoticism with finesse: we recognize the archetypal young man brimming with pride and optimism at his new station, but “A Star for a Warrior” also validates its presumed readers’ understanding of Indians as exotic in their stoicism.

What immediately follows David's revealing gesture pushes the balance abruptly toward the assimilation end of the scale. David bursts into the agency cabin with the Tsihah greeting "*Ahi!*" (italics in original) and explains the source of his enthusiasm: "A writing from the white chiefs, Grandfather. I can now wear the silver star" (4). It's not surprising that Wellman, a writer from a culture that holds the written word in such high esteem, would imagine a written document from "the white chiefs" as the way to confer authority upon David, or choose this iconic sheriff's silver star as the badge reflecting that authority. One might expect the tribal police to certify their own representatives and come up with their own regalia, but since these organizations were modeled on law enforcement agencies in the larger culture, authorities to which tribal police often had to cede jurisdiction, David's announcement is plausible enough even to modern readers. But Tough Feather's reaction contradicts any expectations that an older generation Tsihah would hew more closely to tradition than a young man newly returned from a white police college: "'Reports here,' he said austerely, 'are made in the white man's language.'" And when David begins to repeat the information without the Tsihah exclamation, his grandfather makes him start the whole exchange over from the beginning: "'Suppose,' interrupted Tough Feather, 'that you go outside and come in again—properly.'" This exchange builds readers' sympathy for the exuberant David, but also reveals Tough Feather's understanding of "white man's language." Tough Feather scolds David not primarily for using Tsihah, for only David's greeting "ahi" is in his native tongue. Tough Feather's problem with David's performance is the *way* David uses English. David complies with Tough Feather's preferred mode of police talk during Take #2:

Some of the young man's boisterous happiness drained out of him. Obediently he stepped backward and out, pulling the door shut. He waited soberly for a moment, then re-entered and stood at attention.

“Agency Policeman David Return,” he announced dutifully, “reporting for assignment as directed.”

The militaristic bureaucrat David has learned in police college literally opens the door to his advancement in the tribal police force. Of course, Tough Feather is recalibrating the relationship with his grandson toward the professional, but his stoic Indian face gives away a smidgen of his familial affection: “Tough Feather's thin mouth permitted a smile to soften one of its corners. Tough Feather's deepset black eyes glowed a degree more warmly” (4). That oxymoronic moniker also suggests that Tough Feather may not be as hard as his demeanor suggests.

That Tough Feather corrects David's behavior makes sense—he is helping David acculturate to a new organization—but the ideas about proper police department he is trying to instill bear examination. Indians have long associated themselves with white power, out of self-interest, regard for the group's welfare, or the notion it was the right thing to do, so an Indian authority figure like Tough Feather who demands that another Indian act more “white” is not without precedent, even though we might expect an elder to behave more traditionally than a young man newly returned to a reservation. But then Tough Feather does two unexpected things. He claims law enforcement values *for* Indians—“This police work isn't a white man's plaything. We serve the government, to make things better for all Indians”—and lets slip his own “ahi” before making a covenant with the “son of my son,” a “born chief”: “We work together from this day.” The son of his son displays his hybridity, “‘*Nunway*,’ intoned David, as at a tribal ceremony. ‘Amen. That is my prayer,’” and the two sacralize the occasion with a

pipe: “‘Smoke,’ [Tough Feather] invited deeply. ‘You are my brother warrior’” (5). This passage reassures readers about a couple of comforting notions: the federal government is a force for good; serving the government is a (the?) way to improve Indian lives; and tribal tradition and federal allegiance can be complementary. The hopeful proposition that pipe and silver star can work together successfully will be tested by the ensuing mystery plot.

Each generation assumes enlightened attitudes emerged upon its arrival, but there is a surprisingly modern concern at the heart of this 1945 story: Tough Feather informs David that an anthropologist “wants to learn our secret Tsihah songs” (6). The critique of white expropriation of Indian culture is blunted, however, because rather than a white researcher poking his/her nose into sacred tribal business, the anthropologist is a non-Tsihah Indian, Rhoda Pleasant. Her last name allows David to make a weak joke and thus the narrator to make another observation of commonality: “‘she’s pleasant, all right,’ and he smiled, for Indians relish puns as much as any race in the world” (5-6). According to Tough Feather, Pleasant aspires to “a career as a scholar and an Indian folklore expert” and has already collected songs “Lieurance and Cadman would have given ten years of their life to hear and get down on paper” (6). Both key figures in the “Indianist movement,” Thurlow Lieurance composed three songs in the Smithsonian collection, “Two Indian Songs,” “By the Water of Minnetonka: An Indian Love Song, and “By the Weeping Waters: Chippewa Indian Mourning Song” (Smithsonian Institute), and Charles Wakefield Cadman composed the influential *Four American Indian Songs: Op. 45* in 1909, so Tough Feather knows something of cultural doings beyond the reservation. Tough Feather worries that the attractive Rhoda will entice three young male keepers of the sacred songs—the only members of the tribe entitled to know them—to give away this forbidden knowledge, so he deploys David to retrieve her from where the men are camping out. David once again reveals

attitudes readers will find familiar from a young man. He shows a little resentment toward these peers who have been handed these cultural legacies: “they’re mighty brash about it. . . . They think we others ought to respect and honor them” (6). And he betrays a little vanity as he prepares to meet Rhoda Pleasant, asking for the most beautiful pony rather than the most capable, and a showy saddle to match, causing his grandfather to smile “perhaps his first real smile in twenty or thirty days” and consent to David’s request: “All right, take it [the saddle] and take the prettiest bridle, too. You’re probably right, David. You’ll have less trouble bringing that girl back if you and your pony are good to look at” (7). Our dashing rookie policeman has any amorous hopes dashed, however, when he finds Rhoda murdered beside her tent a little ways from the men’s camp, making the three tradition-bearers the only suspects.

Stacey Weed, John Horse Child, and Dolf Buckskin at first belittle David and his office. David greets them in Tsichah, attempting to foster tribal solidarity, but they refuse to acknowledge either his full adult membership in the tribe or his police authority. Weed “pretended to notice David, and lifted a hand in a careless gesture of greeting. ‘*Ahi*, nephew,’ he said, also in Tsichah.” The narrator informs us that being called nephew by someone only two years older is an insult to a member of this fictional tribe. Then Weed compounds the insult: “‘John,’ called Stacey back to the tent, ‘we must be important. A boy with a new police star has ridden in’” (10). After continued banter from Weed and Horse Child at his expense, David addresses them in English with “the deep, cold voice of unfriendly formality”: “I’m as good a Tsichah as either of you ever dared to be. . . . I’m a good American citizen too, and whether you like it or not this ground is part of a government reservation, under police authority. If we’re going to have trouble it will be of your starting” (11). To David’s mind, his legitimacy derives from two sources, being a “good” Tsichah and a “good” American citizen, especially a

representative of the government. It seems, though, that federal authority easily trumps tribal self-government in David's reckoning. This hierarchy of federal over tribal makes sense given a non-Indian author writing in 1946 when ideas of sovereignty are just beginning to emerge in their modern iterations after the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, but I credit Wellman for giving David's dual allegiances such a prominent role. It prefigures countless later examples of fictional Native American detectives' authority facing challenges from more "traditional" Indians on the one hand and non-Indian law enforcement agents on the other. In many of those texts written after the 1960s, however, Indian characters will not look toward the federal government with the reverence David displays in the 1940s.

David weathers the assaults on his authority and even breaks through to an uneasy acceptance by the three keepers of the songs. When he confronts them with Rhoda's murder, they admit to knowing it, drop the teasing, and signal David's tribal status by offering a "ceremonial pipe": "'Smoke,' urged Stacey. 'We will joke with you no more'" (12). But this gesture does not mean they plan to make David's job easy; the two who are not sure which of their friends committed the murder are ready to cover for the murderer. As Stacey observes, "you can't take the wrong man. The government courts would set him free, and pay damage money for the false arrest. Probably, the policeman who guessed so foolishly would be discharged" (13). Issued this challenge with its threat of humiliation, David vows to identify the killer and pass his first test as a tribal cop.

The solution involves David's understanding of the three men's traditional roles. Despite the assailant's effort to diffuse blame by using the two singers' weapons, a knife and a gun, to fabricate a death wound to Rhoda's throat, David realizes the actual method of murder is a blow to the head by Dolf the drummer with his drumstick, a split stick with an egg-sized stone lashed

to the end. David also surmises that Dolf was jealous because Rhoda tried to seduce the two singers but not him. She could learn everything she needed about the sacred drumming simply by observing, but she would need the singers to reveal their secrets. David explains to Dolf, “you wanted her. She would not look at you, only at John and Stacey. You were left out, and your heart was bad” (20). So the crime springs from both the need to protect cultural tradition, which underlines Tsichah difference, and plain old jealousy, a common motive in the genre. The story closes with David once again fusing his Indian heritage and white training: “An agency policeman’s star should not be dull at the end of his first successful case. It should shine like all the high hopes of all young warriors. Proudly David burnished the metal with his sleeve—until it shone with the wisdom of the Shining Lodge and the strength of the white man’s star” (21). “A Star for a Warrior” won *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine’s* inaugural best story of the year contest presumably because it successfully married fresh Indian subject matter with the familiar detective formula; its characters are exotic enough to most readers to intrigue them, but recognizable enough in their attitudes and actions to confirm readers’ expectations about human behavior.

David’s desire to prove himself, Rhoda’s attempts to charm interested young men into doing what she wants, Dolf’s jealousy—these motives and behaviors transcend any particular culture. But these characters also behave *like* Indians for readers of *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine* because Wellman has designed a tribe that meets generic expectations of the Indian. By doing so, he also shields himself from charges of inaccurate representation, not that a writer in the 1940s would necessarily expect to be challenged about the plausibility of an Indian tale. There is nothing inherently wrong with a creative writer creating a fictional people (much Science Fiction depends on such invention), but the politics of who creates what could stand

scrutiny. I suspect that Indians (along with perhaps Africans) lead the ranks of made-up peoples in popular fiction, and not just in the David Return era. In *Hawk Moon* (1995), with Indian subject matter and Indian characters but outside this study's scope because it has two white detectives separated by decades but working on the same mystery, novelist Ed Gorman sets the record straight on the dedications page: "Note: There is no La Costa tribe. Similarly, I have taken some real liberties with Iowa geography." Satire has a long tradition of invented peoples and lands (think *Gulliver's Travels* or the Marx Brothers singing "Hail, Fredonia!"), but the practice is less common in dramatic fiction, and often features indigenous "tribes." I wonder if a gesture like Wellman's and Gorman's reveals more than a writer's conception of good manners, of not presuming to speak as an outsider for actual peoples. The condescension may not be as bald as with the fictional banana republic (actually bat guano republic!) "San Rosario" in the Super Jim Anthony novel *Legion of Robots* we will discuss in the next chapter, but there is an element of cultural superiority involved with the decision to invent a tribe. Of course it spares the readers from recalling any specific history and spares the writers from worrying about fidelity to any real cultures.

For David Return's second outing, "A Knife Between Brothers," published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in 1947, Wellman once more offers the genre magazine's readers a sturdy reference point, the locked room mystery, a venerable detective-fiction formula. Again, Wellman presents a telling exchange between David and his grandfather before the mystery plot officially gets underway. David repairs a car and snidely asks Tough Feather "are we running a police detail or a garage?" (177). He then balks at two unglamorous potential assignments, explaining that his mission should be "to gather evidence and disarm violent lawbreakers, but not to be a governess or a public relations expert" (177-78). Tough Feather scolds him for believing

“the job begins and ends in trailing criminals and locking them up. If that’s all you do, what will the Tsichah call you? A white man’s Indian” (178). David is stung, and again offers his vision of pipe and silver star unified: “‘I’m an Indian’s Indian,’ he said harshly, ‘and they’d better realize it. I believe in being a good citizen and a good policeman, but I was born a chief of the Tsichah, and that’s a priority. I don’t want to do anything but help my tribe, which is what police are for’” (178).

Tough Feather deploys David to mediate a dispute between two elderly Tsichah, the brothers in the title. Tough Feather informs David that the two traditionals have “never learned to farm” but lease their land to a white step-grandson from Chicago, Avery Packer, “a good farmer” (178). The story’s title misleads readers as David finds one brother, Yellow Bird, knifed in one locked room of their cabin, and the surviving brother, Stone Wolf, the likely suspect sitting in the other room. Avery helpfully feeds David a motive: the two brothers had been feuding. The confused Stone Wolf, eyes “sunken and sad,” confesses to the murder: “Who else could have struck my brother?” (180). Like many of these locked room mysteries (for example, Conan Doyle’s “The Speckled Band”), the solution requires some suspension of disbelief. David finds three pieces of a broken bamboo fishing pole among the firewood stacked outside the locked room’s window and deduces the method of murder: Avery has attached a knife to the pole and thrust it into Yellow Bird through a slim gap in the stuck window, presumably unheard by Stone Wolf. David has Stone Wolf demonstrate his feeble knife thrust, which eliminates the possibility of his guilt and points the finger at Avery Packer.

The crime and its solution are clever enough, but it’s Packer’s motive that is most compelling for our purpose of charting the Indian detective subgenre going forward from Wellman. When Stone Wolf daubs his cheeks red in mourning, David instantly recognizes the

substance as vermilion. Stone Wolf indicates that the vermilion is from “out there, near where the grass is growing. My father and my father’s father got red paint-powder in that place, long before white men ever came here” (183). David realizes that the vermilion is evidence of valuable mercury deposits and that Packer has killed his step-grandfather’s brother and framed his step-grandfather so that property rights will fall to him. Packer first denies David’s reconstruction of the crime (“that’s only Indian paint”), then seizes David’s knife, only to be disarmed by a swift blow to the knuckles by David with a section of bamboo fishing pole. “A Knife Between Brothers” is the only David Return mystery that offers readers a false Indian villain but then reveals a white man coveting an Indian-owned resource, a move Hillerman would make many times in his Navajo policemen series, and one that would accord well with the more environmentally and multiculturally conscious audiences of the 1970s and later.

Wellman’s Indian detective would, indeed, return again in a venue pitched toward a younger audience (with overlap, of course) than *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*: “The Indian Sign” (1948) appeared in the Scouting magazine *Boys’ Life*. The interest in an Indian story is not surprising, given the mimicry of Native Americans by Scouting, as noted by Philip J. Deloria in *Playing Indian* (1999), among others; an ad in the back of the magazine sells “Indian Roaches . . . appropriate for order of the arrow ritual teams,” and includes detailed instructions on how to create your own Native American ceremonial headgear (37).

Wellman knew how to craft a David Return story for this context. His ad-friendly copy was sure to please a magazine publisher. When David approaches a fearful Joseph Arrow awaiting an angry uncle in a relative’s cabin, “the door opened a crack and out stared the muzzle of a .22 rifle, such as every Indian boy buys with his first few dollars” (31), and on the bottom of that same page is the comic strip ad “Action with a Remington 22! A Lesson in Fun,” complete

with safety tips. Wellman also engages the *Boys' Life* audience when David remarks to the young gas station attendant, whom many readers would likely identify with, that “you’re a pretty good investigator yourself, Joseph” (10). The story is compact, with a very limited cast of characters and only one plot twist when David reveals the perpetrator, so it is easy for young readers to follow, and Wellman makes sure they don’t get lost. While patiently waiting in the brush outside the cabin to ambush that angry uncle Bear Tree, David notes how the afternoon is getting on, and he thinks “if a Tsuchah dies by day, his spirit lives forever in the Shining Lodge. If by night—then he goes to the Dead Land, without sun or moon.” Then Wellman has his protagonist put two and two together for the less attentive readers: “Bear Tree, however angry he is, will not let that happen to himself. He will try to strike before sunset” (31). Even the fact that the story refers to David, after the introductory paragraph, only by first name makes the character more accessible to Boy Scouts, though that practice carries over from the character’s debut to an older audience in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*, where it highlighted his status as a new police recruit.

The nice thing about inventing a tribe for your Indian detective, besides that you are shielded from charges of cultural inaccuracy, is that you can invent any customs you want for the sake of plot, such as this death by day versus night belief. But Wellman does use his fictional policeman from a fictional tribe to do some moral teaching about real Indians. The story does so carefully, however, without alienating young white readers. The foil is the white deputy sheriff who believes he has the case just about sewn up when David arrives at the scene of the crime, a gas station and cottage owned by a white man, Guy Aber, but on Indian land so that Aber needs to make regular payments to Bear Tree. The deputy sheriff is a prima donna dressed in “a handsome rodeo shirt, an eighty-dollar [in 1948!] sombrero, embroidered high-heeled boots. His

two gun holsters hung dashingly low. His badge was brighter even than David's well-polished star" (11). Though he outshines David sartorially to the point of being a lightweight dandy, the deputy sheriff's speech and attitudes reveal his lesser education and his bigotry toward Indians. The white lawman announces condescendingly and ungrammatically that "we solve crime scientific around here in Osceola County. Maybe you can learn something." It is no surprise to readers, therefore, that David will later disprove the deputy sheriff's theory. David, "of the Tsichah tribe, noted for its courtesy and reserve," almost inadvertently upstages the deputy sheriff but catches himself: "'I went to Indian Institute with Joseph, before he went to the State University and I—' David stopped. It wouldn't be polite to mention his year at police college" (10). Shortly afterward, the deputy sheriff interrupts Joseph's account of his uncle threatening him—"Then Bear Tree talked English,' put in the deputy. 'Short, broken-up, old-time Injun talk'" (10)—and displays his need to dominate the conversation, in sharp contrast to David's reserve. The deputy sheriff is uneducated and backward in his outlook toward Indians rather than evil-hearted; when David asks if Bear Tree said anything about the charge that he has conked Guy Aber's head with a pop bottle, the deputy sheriff replies "just scowled. Lots of your people can't forget how them or their dads used to scalp whites" (10). The Boy Scouts reading this story are invited to scoff at this character, especially when both the deputy sheriff's solution to the crime and his racial theory about Bear Tree's scowling silence are dispatched by the end of the tale, allowing readers to congratulate themselves for much more enlightened ideas about Indians.

Wellman's little story is remarkable because it manages in a confined space (four pages of *Boys' Life* with room for advertisements and cartoons) to address three interrelated themes that will become staples of Indian detective fiction—land ownership/law enforcement

jurisdiction, environmentalism versus greed/“progress,” and assimilation versus fidelity to one’s native culture—*and* because it shields readers from deeply considering the implications of these issues. When David brings Joseph Arrow onto the reservation to protect Joseph from his uncle Bear Tree, David’s grandfather Tough Feather, the senior tribal policeman, approves: “You were right to bring Joseph.” Tough Feather has more faith in the Tsichah to take care of their own rather than rely on outsiders: “Out there is white man’s land, guarded by white police. Here, on Indian land, we Indian police are the guards.” David’s response, rather than affirming or challenging Tough Feather’s assessment, turns attention toward the alleged perpetrator: “‘Bear Tree is a Tsichah,’ remarked David soberly. ‘Whatever he has done, I do not want to arrest a Tsichah when a white policeman should do it. Here, as you say, it is different’” (11). As we will see, David has no problem arresting an Indian criminal on the reservation, but he apparently also has no problem with ceding authority to white law enforcement beyond the reservation’s boundaries. There is no chafing at the restriction, just as there is nothing in Tough Feather’s observation to lead readers toward questioning this stable division of the world between white and Indian land. This brief exchange between David and his grandfather is the first instance of the story raising complex issues but rushing past careful consideration of them.

Granted, “The Indian Sign” is a compressed short story aimed at a juvenile and young adult audience, and even having an Indian protagonist is a progressive gesture in 1948; near the front of the magazine a full-page ad for the Danny Kaye and Virginia Mayo movie *A Song Is Born* (1948) exhorts us to “hear these hit songs!,” including “Redskin Rhumba” (4). But this pattern of touching on thorny issues without giving characters or readers the opportunity to explore them holds for two other themes in “The Indian Sign.” Guy Aber wants a highway that will make his gas station much more valuable, but Indian landowner Bear Tree, according to the

deputy sheriff's report, "said no, not to gobble any of his land into a paved road. He was right old-fashioned about it" (10). David figures out that young gas station attendant Joseph Arrow has tried to murder Abel and frame his uncle so that both land and the potentially lucrative service station will fall into his hands, so readers are nudged by Joseph's revealed scheme and the eventually discredited deputy sheriff's "old-fashioned" assessment toward disapproving of the highway project, especially since Joseph has fallen away from his Indian heritage: "I told Bear Tree I'd forgotten most of my Tsichah [language] since I'd been away to school" (10). The positive message is that "real" Indians, unlike the lapsed Joseph Arrow, keep nature from being despoiled in the name of progress but in the service of greed, though such a moral of the story could lead to the presumption that all "real" Indians will automatically be against such things as improved roads—to believe otherwise would damage their credibility as traditional. This exoticizing impulse precludes Indians from engaging with the modern world, an attitude Philip J. Deloria has exposed so thoroughly in *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004). Of course there are limits to the story's critique of the exploitation of Indian land by non-Indians. None of the characters considers whether Aber's agreement with first Bear Tree's father and then Bear Tree to lease the gas station site is an ethical use of Indian land (why shouldn't an Indian-owned business occupy that site?) or whether the arrangement leads to fair compensation for the Indians. But it is admirable that this short text makes room to allude to such complex and important issues, and even surprising to hear a note of caution against "development" in this era, coming out of depression and world war, when the gospel of Progress would go mostly unchallenged and the environmental movement was still nascent.

The response to progress meshes with the story's brief treatment of identity politics. David Return not only contrasts with the ignorant white police officer, he also stands out in sharp

relief against the young Indian Joseph Arrow. Joseph has lost his mooring in tribal tradition, which presumably contributes to his selfish and wicked actions; David, a successful hybrid character, has gone to college off the reservation *and* maintained his tribal roots. David admires Bear Tree's ultra-patient camouflaged approach to the cabin where Joseph is cowering: "He covers himself in leafy branches, then hunches forward. A finger's width at a time. He is Tsichah like me, full of Tsichah wisdom" (32). As David sneaks up behind the sneaking Bear Tree, his thoughts highlight one of David's crucial differences from the story's villain: Bear Tree "expects no hunter to watch for him, only Joseph Arrow, who has forgotten Tsichah ways at the white university" (32). David, on the other hand, has apparently balanced these two gravitational fields, leveraging Tsichah wisdom and ways as well as police college training. David even declares his dual allegiance. After he has jumped Bear Tree and wrestled away his rifle, David asks why Bear Tree was angry only with his nephew and not with the white policemen who originally apprehended him before he escaped to go after Joseph: "'They did nothing bad to me,' growled the older man. 'Only what their law told them. They were bound by their law.'" Bear Tree's philosophical reasoning is another way the text's critique of justice toward Indians betrays its limits; that a man who has been falsely accused and dragged to the county jail would offer such a dispassionate assessment of his captors is probably unrealistic, as is the notion that "their law" would go uncontested by Bear Tree. David replies, "you would say that, I knew. Stand still. I, too, do what is right—by white law and Tsichah law, too" (33). The simple present rather than the present progressive ("I do," not "I am doing") suggests that David is stating a code of conduct rather than just referring to the circumstances at hand. The story neatly skirts the possibility that David would have to choose *between* the two laws when they come into conflict. Similarly, David is silent about the prospect of a paved highway running through this

patch of Indian land. He has navigated both Indian and white worlds successfully, but this tale does not force him to take any stand that will test that conclusion.

“The Indian Sign” ends with an outdoor, reservation version of the classic drawing room mystery denouement. After disarming Bear Tree, David surprises Joseph with the command “tell me why *you* hit Guy Aber on the head and tried to kill him” and explains the crime and attempt to frame Bear Tree with a finger-printed pop bottle and footprints made with Bear Tree’s discarded moccasins, leading Joseph to confess:

“All right,” Joseph gestured miserably. “I did it. Just the way you tell it. But I don’t see how you found out.”

“By every sign on the trail,” David said, relaxing. “The Indian sign, Joseph. Leave it to an Indian to see the sign of his own people’s way of doing things, good or bad.” (33)

This theme of the Indian as master tracker will mark Sam Watchman and Johnny Ortiz, two characters from the 1970s reboot of the Native American detective, as well as countless later iterations. Readers will certainly be aware of this legendary Indian attribute; a cartoon by J. Simpkins from this very edition of *Boys’ Life* (but curiously in proximity to an article about skiing at Boy Scout camp rather than Wellman’s story) gently lampoons the tracker figure: an Indian sporting breechcloth, feather, and bow and quiver kneels and holds a stethoscope to the ground (41), just the sort of humor—“traditional” Indian clashingly juxtaposed with the modern—that Deloria explores. Besides the iconic moccasins in Wellman’s tale, however, there’s nothing particularly “Indian” about the trail Joseph Arrow leaves and David follows; David’s answer to “how you found out” offers neater closure than warranted by the plot, though David is certainly more perceptive than the agents of white law enforcement, who are fooled by

Joseph into charging the scowling Bear Tree, with his unapologetically uncertain command of English.

Even if the purported “Indian Sign” does not really amount to much beyond Joseph using moccasins to make fake tracks, having “Indian” in the title is a smart marketing move for a *Boys’ Life* audience prompted by Scouting’s nomenclature, imagery, and rituals to be extra-curious about Native Americans. The story’s title evokes an essentialism that would barely raise an eyebrow in 1948, though fewer people today, at least in academe if not the general public, would be comfortable with that definitive article in “The Indian Sign.” Those of us trained to automatic skepticism toward such essentialist pronouncements can appreciate David’s emphasis on behavior (“the sign of his own people’s way of doing things”) rather than some mystical innate Indianness. His proposition that it takes an Indian to understand Indians will be seconded fairly regularly by later Native American detective fiction, ironically much of it written by non-Indians like Wellman. Wellman could have ended the text without those three final words, “good or bad,” but this closing note opens up moral possibilities perhaps not sufficiently contemplated by the Boy Scouts following David Return’s investigation, or many other contemporary readers the story found. The idea of “good” Indians, not necessarily tied to accommodation of European colonists and American settlers, is refreshing given the steady parade of “savage” Indians in print and on stage and screen. And the notion that an Indian can do wrong and behave against the dictates of his or her conscience grants a fuller sense of humanity than either the militant hordes in the movies or the noble Indian images (or less noble cartoons) in magazines like *Boys’ Life*.

David Return is indeed particularly skilled at tracking “his own people” who do bad things in two of his three stories. “A Star for a Warrior” and “The Indian Sign” offer Native American villains, softening the impact of Wellman’s radical move: an Indian protagonist with

legal authority. Only in “A Knife Between Brothers,” which from the title until the moment the culprit is revealed teases readers with the prospect of Indian fratricide, does Wellman show his Indian policeman besting a white man in a brief struggle and arresting him. It’s likely that Hillerman was aware of Wellman’s detective character; as a president of the Mystery Writers of America, he surely knew the story that won the first Ellery Queen prize, “A Star for a Warrior.” But whether he was aware of “A Knife Between Brothers” or not, Hillerman, as well as many other writers decades later, would use this formula of an Indian character appearing guilty but a white manipulator being unmasked by the Indian detective; such a plot allows writers to invoke the figure of the dangerous Indian without owning it when changing social perspectives helped make minority villains less palatable.

Even with the notoriety from the literary prize, Wellman apparently decided not to keep writing stories for the David Return character after just three episodes. Wellman had a long and prosperous career in a tough business—Jeremiah Rickert reports that he published 500 stories and more than 80 books!—so we can probably trust that his professional judgment of the market was sound (whatever other reasons he may have had for not returning to his young Indian detective protagonist). That Mystery market was moving away from the short stories that birthed the genre with Poe and popularized it with Conan Doyle, and toward the cheap paperback novels flooding bookstores after World War II. Wellman wrote stories and novels with recurring characters in fantasy, horror, and even mystery genres, but he must not have been interested in writing an Indian detective novel, and it’s surprising no one else would for over twenty years.

Spotted Shield Detect Good

Another non-Indian writer much more familiar with real Indians also garnered accolades from the *Ellery Queen* contest judges for an indigenous detective story. Anthropologist, fiction writer, and American Indian rights advocate Oliver La Farge, winner of the 1930 Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Laughing Boy* about Navajos and subject of a biography by D'Arcy McNickle (Salish Kootenai), took third place in the 1951 contest with "Woman Hunt No Good." Like *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective*, this tale presents a wrongly-accused suitor exonerated by a clever Indian, but readers know Paul Lincoln is innocent from the opening scene, and the victim is not the object of his courting, Barbara McDonough, but an elderly Indian "medicine man" (328) whose body Paul and Barbara discover while they are hunting. Golquain Apache (a fictional tribe) police chief Spotted Shield reads the signs of the crime better than his white counterparts and leads them to the real killer.

Though Spotted Shield is the detective/protagonist, there is slippage over who is "our hero," as in *Phil Scott*. The story also invites readers to pull for Paul Lincoln, a somewhat embellished stand-in for the author. Barbara's father, Sheriff John McDonough, casts a suspicious eye toward his daughter's friend Paul. The alma mater and academic discipline Paul shares with La Farge win him no points from this prospective father-in-law, who reflects that Lincoln is "an Easterner with a Harvard accent. Further, he was an anthropologist, hence a long-hair, to be suspected of a sloppy sentimentalism towards mankind in general and Indians in particular." John McDonough distrusts Paul's motives: "He was a man destined to eke out his life as a professor unless he succeeded in luring an innocent Western girl, endowed with a rancher's fortune, into matrimony" (323). La Farge is having some fun at his own expense here, but the narrator stands up for Paul, who is no effete Easterner: "he was built like the halfback he

had been” and served on a destroyer escort in the war (324). The narrator makes a point to mention that Paul and Barbara ask for permission to hunt on the reservation. Paul shows that he is a careful student of the Apache language when he pronounces the victim’s name: “In his mild, academic way he gave the name its exact Apache inflection” (325); the name is spelled “Gotahni” when Paul or the Indian characters say it, but “Go-tawney” when Barbara or the other white characters pronounce it. Paul earns respect from the Sheriff for trying to keep the Sheriff’s daughter’s name out of the murder investigation; because of that paternal suspicion, Paul and Barbara had gone hunting in secret, and Paul realizes that the Democratic District Attorney Salazar would jump at the chance to drag his Republican rival McDonough into a scandal by charging Barbara as an accessory. Finally, Paul disarms the cornered killer when Blair starts blasting away at the arresting party. The Indian detective solves the case, but the white anthropologist proves himself a good and capable fellow.

Blair is a symbolically useful villain, a bad white man set in sharp relief to Paul’s good one. He is a bureaucrat, the “Chief Accountant” of the reservation, which carries with it whatever taint of scandal a reader chooses to imagine. He drives a “new sedan” (327) presumably noteworthy to the observer Spotted Shield because there are not many new vehicles in Golquain Apache country. He abuses his station: “Everyone knew that Blair brought liquor onto the reservation, and got away with it because he was a white man and important. Some day Whittrup, the agent, would get tough, Spotty thought, but when? Whittrup tended to dodge unpleasantness, then when he did act, to act too violently” (327). Tribal Chief of Police Spotted Shield’s reluctance to confront Blair and dependence on the unsteady Whittrup for justice help place the reservation setting in a colonial context. Indeed, the story’s first line situates the soon-to-be-discovered murder scene as “close by the logging road which leads to Soldier Spring”

(323). There's a good chance the logging is not carried on by or primarily for Apaches, and the soldiers for whom the spring is named were probably Spanish or federal. Contrasted to Paul and Barbara's respectful request to hunt, Blair's crime epitomizes a casual attitude toward Indian territory and the hunter's ethical code. Sheriff McDonough explains, "looks like we got a case of the kind o' huntin' a man ought to be lynched for even if he hadn't hit anything—shot from his car at a rustle in the bushes without troublin' to see what it was" (336). Rather than owning up to his tragic lapse in judgment, the craven Blair tries to frame Paul. As Paul shows Gotahni's body to the Sheriff and Blair, Blair asks, "Didn't he say he was going to run you off the reservation for poking into the ceremonies?" "Woman Hunt No Good" presents the same tension between keepers of cultural lore and academic seekers as Wellman's "A Star for a Warrior," but dispatches with the concern in just one line as Paul replies, "He did, but he was getting over it" (329). And Gotahni's "getting over" his resistance is the last note on the subject. Blair—and not the admirable anthropologist Paul Lincoln who mourns the medicine man's passing—represents the real threat to the Golquain Apache. Paul remarks that Gohtahni was a "wonderful old character. Lord, what knowledge has died with him" (325).

The story generally approves Paul's ambitions to learn about the Golquain Apache, but it also dramatizes the cultural gulf he must traverse. Unlike David Return with his year in "police college" or even David's grandfather Tough Feather with his insistence on proper English for police reports, La Farge's detective lives much further from assimilation; rather, he achieves a functional bi-culturalism (or, in this case, tri-culturalism, as Spanish is very much in the mix). The narrator introduces the detective protagonist with a literary joke that tweaks the myth of the Vanishing Indian: "It is reported that certain mild, recurrent seismic disturbances which have been recorded at Fordham University are caused by Fenimore Cooper spinning in his grave when

Spotted Shield, Chief of Police of the Golquain Agency, emerges into the morning” (325).

Spotted Shield is no Sherlock Holmes with an Indian backstory, like Alexander Knox’s Eagels.

Spotted Shield speaks a pidgin English that is difficult for his white listeners to follow. The narrator illustrates Spotted Shield’s difficulties with the alien sounds when the Chief of Police answers “oll hraight” (all right) to the Sheriff: “It was the only word in English in which he had achieved the sound of *r*” (333). It’s no wonder, then, that Spotted Shield has trouble getting his mouth around a word like “accessory” as he explains to her father Paul’s reluctance to involve Barbara, and also unsurprising that he disregards English’s pesky gender references as he sprinkles Spanish and Apache into the message:

“Him [Barbara] come jail-side while you phone, say him tell you. Lincum say no. *E-do-ta jinn*. You talk, mebbe-so acksissly you, him say.”

“What?”

In the course of his career Spotted Shield had acquired a considerable legal vocabulary. How he pronounced these words after he learned them was between himself and God. “Acksissly. Lincum say Salazar Demothah, want tloubyu you, make you girl acksissly. *Donzhonni, callete la boca*, him say.” (334)

Spotted Shield’s attempts to communicate in English are a far cry from Phil Scott’s and Eagels’s erudition, but probably a realistic transcription of someone at the intersection of three cultures and coming to English later in life. And Spotted Shield has received no formal training in the language; he cannot read a single English letter. After he sees a monogrammed woman’s handkerchief in Blair’s car, he draws the letter in the dirt and asks his subordinate, Feather’s Son, a Marine veteran, “you know this paper-track?” and then “what woman here could it belong to?” (330). Similarly, Spotted Shield may gauge the positions of the hands rather than recognizing

numbers when he “reads” a clock atop the Administration Building: “Whether or not he could read numbers, Spotted Shield could tell the important hours of the day on the clock in the little tower” (327). Later as he leaves the police station, Spotted Shield tells Feather’s Son that “he would be back in a hand’s-breadth of the sun’s climb,” showing that he has not internalized white timekeeping. Readers might be captivated or frustrated by Spotted Shield’s idiom and his difficulty conveying complex ideas to white listeners, but they will get some sense of the work it takes to overcome cultural barriers.

Along with these fundamental differences in speaking, reading, and reckoning the passage of time, Spotted Shield holds beliefs about appropriate gender domains that Blair and Paul have transgressed by both having taken women hunting that morning. His disapproval carries over to the “hunt” for the criminal: “They [Sheriff McDonough and Spotted Shield] set out briskly for the small building on the upper floor of which Blair lived. Paul and Barbara followed. Had they been Indians, Spotted Shield would have sent her back. Women were too much in this already.” Spotted Shield believes he does not have authority over the white characters and thinks as McDonough is about to burst open the door that “this was white men’s business, he would take part only in a crisis” (337). And when the crisis erupts, Barbara reflexively grabs his arm, keeping Spotted Shield from intervening to protect Paul and her father from Blair’s wild shot gun blasts. As Spotted Shield recounts the scene to Feather’s Son in clear Apache,

“McDonough’s daughter was ashamed. Holding my arm like that might have cost her man’s life. But she lost herself only for a moment, then recovered. She could not help it—these things are not women’s business. All those women out hunting, no wonder

there was trouble.” He nodded, and said in English, for emphasis: “Woman hunt no good.” (338)

For all his Holmes-worthy deductions in examining the tracks and appraising the clues, Spotted Shield here makes a cause-and-effect connection that shows how much he differs culturally from Holmes’s strictly rationalistic worldview.

Spotted Shield’s assessment leads Michael E. Grost to one of his two complaints about “Woman Hunt No Good”: “It suffers from a not very well concealed villain in the easily guessed mystery plot, and a sexism in the treatment of the role of women in allegedly macho pursuits such as hunting and crime fighting—a sexism that extends to the title.” The story’s weak whodunit challenge is cause for a legitimate gripe, though Spotted Shield’s reading of the footprints offers readers the pleasures of detection: Spotted Shield realizes that Paul Lincoln could not have stepped on a shell he fired because he was moving forward and the shotgun ejects shells backwards; hence, someone else had earlier fired the fatal shot.

The sexism charge is another matter. We should allow for some critical distance between character and creator instead of accepting Spotted Shield’s ratification of the story’s title at face value, which does not mean all readers will refrain from collapsing Spotted Shield’s and Oliver La Farge’s worldviews. In 1951 many Americans shared similar rigid notions of appropriate gender behavior whether they proclaimed them out loud or not, and some still do subscribe to such values, so we can’t be sure whether readers laughed more *with* or *at* Spotted Shield’s moral of the story. We can, though, give La Farge credit for imagining a character who emerges organically from his time, place, and culture. And even if we don’t agree that La Farge’s title is tongue-in-cheek, we can caution Grost against dismissing a text by measuring it against a modern moral yardstick. Still, Grost is not wrong, at least about the character’s if not the story’s

sexism: asserting that women cannot or should not hunt is sexist. What then if a culture (the Golquain Apache, for instance) holds beliefs about masculine and feminine domains that do not accord with outsiders' notions? Again with the caveat that many 1951 *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* subscribers would be less outraged by Spotted Shield's taboo against the huntress than modern readers, I appreciate this story's attempt to illustrate deep-seated cultural differences and forego the temptation to provide readers a protagonist just like themselves but with an Indian name and perhaps some exotic trappings.

From Spotted Shield's perspective, uttering this plain truth that women have no business hunting is not disrespecting women but respecting tradition, and we readers can try to understand his worldview without forfeiting our own ideas of right and wrong. But it is not easy to respect difference, and the white characters fall short on this measure. The story subtly shows the giving and getting of respect among the Indian characters in several instances. Spotted Shield learns of the death when Feather's Son tells him

“Things are happening, my grandfather.”

“What things?”

“Gotahni-n.”

The simple name, with the *-n* of respect for the dead added to it, conveyed a complete message. Spotted Shield covered his mouth with his hand for a moment. Then he asked, “In what manner?” (329)

Feather's Son's “grandfather” is a sign of deference to an elder, not a recognition of a family relation as with David Return and Tough Feather. Similarly, Spotted Shield receives and gives generational respect when he visits the Superintendent's office: “The girl at the desk by Whittrup's door made no attempt to stop him. She lowered her eyes and greeted him

respectfully in Apache. He said, ‘Little Sister,’ and opened the door” (330). And Spotted Shield reveals something of his own relationship to an elder as well as Apache beliefs concerning the dead when he examines Gotahni’s body: “Spotty came near enough and bent low enough to see well, but kept as far from contamination as he could. As it was, he would have to have himself cleansed, and this man, whose body lay here, was the one to whom always before he had gone for that” (332-3).

The white characters, on the other hand, use an informal tone with Spotted Shield that diminishes his stature rather than respects his position and capabilities, starting with the reprehensible Blair’s greeting “morning, Spotty” (327). The narrator introduces the protagonist as Spotted Shield and retains that name when he converses with other Apache but switches to “Spotty” in the white characters’ scenes with the Chief of Police, suggesting how the two groups estimate the same character very differently. Spotted Shield takes no apparent offense at the nickname the whites have bestowed on him, but he does seek more formal recognition from them, as the narrator spends a fair amount of time explaining when Spotted Shield first appears onstage:

He himself, as he enjoyed his cigarette, was thinking about a lack which had long plagued him. There had been talk once of deputizing him in the county, so that when necessary he could pick up Apaches in Arenosa, which was no lily of a town. The plan had been dropped. It had left him with the realization that by this means he could have two badges. He had never seen a policeman with two badges, and he longed for that distinction. (326)

Spotted Shield is hoping for jurisdiction beyond the reservation, if only over fellow Apaches, but the passive construction of “the plan had been dropped” suggests even this modest proposal did

not receive serious consideration. As the Sheriff, Paul, and Spotted Shield take Blair into custody, Spotted Shield makes one more attempt at that badge:

They took the prisoner to the Sheriff's car. There, Spotty said without hope,
 "Mebbe-so you deppity me, help take'em jail."

"Deputize you, Spotty?" McDonough smiled. "No need to bother you. Paul will drive, and I'll cover him. Thanks just the same."

Barbara said, "Thanks for everything."

"Yess." (337)

For his clever detection that leads to Paul's exoneration, Spotted Shield receives genuine gratitude from Barbara and gratitude mixed with condescension from her father, but no enhancement of his authority. La Farge surely knew of Wellman's prize-winning story "A Star for a Warrior," however, and it is telling that unlike David Return *his* warrior will be handed down no star from white authority. "Shield" is an appropriate enough name for a protector, but why is this character's name "Spotted Shield"? Perhaps the name also suggests the limits of the Tribal Police Chief's power in this colonial context.

La Farge had published one Spotted Shield tale, "Policeman Follow Order" (1938), long before Wellman's Indian lawman arrived on the scene, so the Spotted Shield character is not just a response to David Return. If "Woman Hunt No Good" presents no difficult challenge to discover whodunit, "Policeman Follow Order" foregoes the Mystery formula entirely. It offers a similar setup—suspect suitor from the East sneaks off with daughter of powerful father from the West—but the lovers, rather than stumbling upon a murder victim while hunting, take two horses and a pack mule and elope. Hoping to thwart their marriage plans, the father demands the law pursue these "horse thieves," and the acting superintendent of the Jicarilla Apache Agency puts

Spotted Shield and a younger Indian policeman on Jack and Anne's trail with the instructions, "the horses are stolen. You are to bring them in. Savvy?" (129).

The story devotes much space to showcasing Spotted Shield's tracking acumen and his musings on white culture. Unlike "Woman Hunt No Good" with its strategic use of the names Spotty versus Spotted Shield, this narrator seems to alternate at random. The latter story also contrasts Spotted Shield's fluent Apache with his unsteady English more effectively. In this scene, Spotted Shield reads trail signs and foreign cultures with his younger partner:

Spotty stopped, pointed and grunted. He looked amused. Here the horses had been going at a slow walk, side by side, and you could see where they must have been pressing together, and the one the woman was riding—the one which made a shallower print—had been thrown off its stride. Ted grinned, and Spotty half laughed.

"That's why white men like to have their women ride beside them," Spotty said.

"So they can put their mouths together." (131)

I first assumed this grammatical pronouncement was conducted in Apache, but very soon afterward, with no announced shift from Apache to English, Spotted Shield addresses Ted in pidgin English as he interprets the evidence at the site of the couple's lunch break: "'No more hurry. . . . Very much love,' he said. 'They sat very near together'" (131). There is no reason for Spotted Shield and Ted to be conversing here in English. La Farge seems not to have fully figured out how to present his character's trilingualism, something he handles so effectively in "Woman Hunt No Good."

Spotted Shield is more a trickster figure in his first adventure. Ted wants to let the couple escape, especially since the father, we are told, has been no friend to Indians, but Spotted Shield insists they complete the assignment: "We are not policemen for fun" (132). He sends Ted back

to the agency and makes him promise to relay a message: “Tell them that I have them, and will bring them in. Say just that, and don’t change it” (134). And when he catches up with the couple, he relieves them of horses and mule but allows them to continue on foot toward a ranch where they can hitch a ride to town and get married, even slyly directing them away from a town still in the father’s county—“Road heap bad. Damn bump-bump. . . . Heap bad t’at way” (138)—and toward another town beyond his reach. Jack attributes their choice of destination to good fortune, but Anne sees through Spotted Shield’s act:

“I never would have thought of it [heading for San Gregorio rather than Tanneville] if it hadn’t been for that bad road, ‘damn bump-bump.’” He laughed. “It’s lucky for us that Indian was so dumb.”

“I’m not just sure how dumb he was,” Anne said thoughtfully. (139)

Spotted Shield will have to play dumb again when he returns to the agency with horses and mule but no eloping couple, which first makes him sigh but then amuses him: “Lifting up his voice, he sang a gambling song with a fast tempo. Into it he wove new words, ‘The policeman follows orders.’ Suddenly he began to laugh, and for some minutes rode on, laughing” (139). As in “Woman Hunt No Good,” Spotted Shield must work with, through, and around white authorities who constrain his power yet underestimate him. Spotted Shield is not free to disregard his policeman’s orders, but his trickster move subverts white authority. In both stories, Spotted Shield assists young white couples who feel the agency to challenge authority more directly than Spotted Shield does—in their situations, parental authority. But in “Woman Hunt No Good,” he identifies Gohtahni’s murderer, so he is not only the benefactor of star-crossed white lovers. Spotted Shield’s decision in “Policeman Follow Order” to ignore the father’s implicit command by following instructions to the letter abruptly transforms our straightforward understanding of

the story's title. That realization may lend confidence to reading some irony as well in the title of Spotted Shield's next story, "Woman Hunt No Good."

La Farge's Golquain Apache police chief Spotted Shield intrigues because the Dialectic of Diversity is so dynamic in this character. He is much more on the exotic end than any other Indian detective we have discussed besides Scundoo, Jack London's Tlingit shaman on the fringes of European contact, but he also confronts modernity, talking on the telephone, handling the reservation bureaucracy, and even understanding something of Republicans versus Democrats in local politics. He holds traditional Apache beliefs and uses logic to solve the crime. He does not seek admittance into the world of Paul and Barbara or Jack and Anne à la Phil Scott, only respect that they mostly withhold—especially the men. La Farge gives his mainstream readers a sense of the alien that they would not receive from meeting young David Return, and a suggestion of the power structures Spotted Shield must navigate on his reservation. Not surprisingly, La Farge's familiarity with Indians enables him to provide a cultural richness not evident in Wellman's parables, but the *Ellery Queen* audience would likely respond more favorably to a more accessible protagonist like David Return, and they would certainly look for greater emphasis on mystery and solution than on Anthropology. One of Hillerman's successful moves twenty years later will be to make the Anthropology *serve* the mystery and solution and dispense the cultural info in measured doses through characters readers can identify with. It is too bad La Farge did not write more of these Spotted Shield stories after "Woman Hunt No Good" because he has shown how to create an Indian detective who is alive in the tensions of assimilation and exoticism and is not so comfortingly legible for readers.

Instead of working through Spotted Shield's syntax, most readers would rather spend time with characters with some exotic flavor but who still mirror themselves, or idealized

versions of themselves. In the next chapter, I will consider attempts before the 1970s to establish recurring Indian detective protagonists in a print serial and in the new medium of television. Each of these characters draws on recognizable templates—the pulp fiction action hero, the Western marshal, and the hard-boiled urban detective—and lands much closer than Spotted Shield towards the assimilationist pole of the dialectic of diversity, thus offering mainstream readers and viewers an easier connection with an “Indian” subject.

Chapter Three

Serial Detection: Indian Investigators in Recurring Roles

The Indian detective made only sporadic appearances before the mini-boom of such characters since the 1970s, which prompts the question what changed around 1970 to make Native American Mysteries more appealing to writers and readers? Why after failing to catch on with the reading and viewing public for 90 years did Indian detectives rapidly become much more marketable? In this chapter, I will consider four attempts to establish recurring Indian detective characters before Tony Hillerman broke through with a successful franchise. To reach mass audiences, these serial sleuths were cast in the mold of other commercially successful contemporary popular culture protagonists, and all four land toward the assimilationist pole of the Dialectic of Diversity.

An early 1940s pulp fiction Indian adventurer started as an unabashed copy of the action hero Doc Savage and then got retooled as hard-boiled private detective, the first incarnation offering an Indian sheen and the second by and large forgetting those elements of his makeup. The third also came out of the gritty tough guy school of detectives, an urban gumshoe from the get-go, and mostly indistinguishable from the non-Indian cops 60s television served up nightly. The second, an 1880s Apache deputy marshal with his own television Western at the close of the 1950s, suggested the setting but not the time period that would eventually draw more readers if not viewers to the Indian detective protagonist. The fourth, in transplanting that 1880s deputy marshal to present-day New Mexico, illustrated the template for the more popular Indian detectives that were just beginning to appear on bookstands in the early 1970s, Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn and his competitors and imitators. In wresting from the Western the cultural work of making the Indian legible, the Native American Mystery novel retained key elements from that

genre—wide-open landscapes, frontier justice, strong, silent men with guns—while bringing literary Indians into the present and switching them from the adversary to the hero position.

Finally, I will discuss how tensions in 1960s and 70s American culture opened space for this proliferation of Indian detective characters from Joe Leaphorn onwards. Though the 60s white counterculture had symbolically claimed the Indian, Leaphorn and company—following the lead of these four television series detectives—brought Indian characters onto the side of “Law and Order” conservatives while offering enough barbs thrown at The Establishment and critiques of racism to appeal to liberal/progressive readers as well.

What marks commercial success in the Mystery field, perhaps more than any other literary genre, is the series, which indicates that readers are willing to spend hours of their finite lives, over and over, to follow the career of a favorite detective through case after case. For example, Sue Grafton’s Kinsey Millhone series ran from *A is for Alibi* to *Y is for Yesterday*; she died one novel short of an entire alphabet set. And new entries in the field seek to jumpstart this kind of serial success: Susan Slater’s *The Pumpkin Seed Massacre* (1999) informs us on the cover above the title that it is “The First Ben Pecos Mystery,” and the inside back jacket reassures us that this outing of Slater’s new Tewa/white detective “will be followed by her second Ben Pecos novel, *Yellow Lies*.” Slater has so far made it to three entries in the Ben Pecos chronicle. We don’t see anything like this Kinsey Millhone-level customer loyalty toward an Indian detective until Joe Leaphorn arrives in the 1970s, though the attempt was made to establish a recurring indigenous sleuth in print, unlike Alexander Knox’s “new” character Falcon for his second Indian detective novel.

Sleuth Is Super (Native) American

The only Indian detective character who generated sustained interest prior to Hillerman's Navajo policemen was an action hero named Jim Anthony. The Indian and Irish Anthony starred in twenty-five stories in the pulp magazine *Super-Detective* between October, 1940 and October, 1943 by several authors working under the pseudonym John Grange, including Victor Rousseau, Robert Leslie Bellem, and W.T. Ballard. According to Kevin Burton Smith, Anthony was modeled rather too closely on the more successful pulp character Doc Savage. Like Doc Savage, this character originally had super powers such as night vision and psychic ability, but "eventually the more fantastic elements were toned down and then dropped altogether. . . and Anthony became more of a standard hard-boiled gumshoe of the pulps." That standard calls for sardonic, wise-cracking dialogue and monologue, a cynical stance toward the world (perhaps at odds with a romantic core), physical toughness, and firsthand acquaintance with economic struggle. The fabulously wealthy and expensively educated Jim Anthony, despite that regular guy name, does not quite fit into the Sam Spade/Philip Marlowe mold after the makeover. Rather than projecting world-weary resignation over an idealistic core like Philip Marlowe, Anthony earnestly goes about saving the world, or at least the American part of it. Both early and late versions of Jim Anthony share Philip Marlowe's celebration of masculinity, a concern that runs through the Mystery genre and would be taken up by many purveyors of Indian detectives.

Eagels and Jim Anthony mark the polar ends of a wide range of masculinity, with David Return in the middle but closer to Eagels. Despite his memories of deer stalking with naught but a knife, Eagels is a cerebral fellow. Like his idol Sherlock Holmes, he could no doubt defend himself in a dangerous moment, but Eagels doesn't even get his fingers dirty in *The*

Disappearance of Archibald Forsyth. The ladies' man Jim Anthony is no slouch in the brain department (Smith informs us that he “excelled in physics, psychiatry, and electro-chemistry”) but, befitting a pulp hero, makes his living with his fists (fig. 3): “judging by the covers of *Super-Detective*—whether he was battling evil criminal masterminds hellbent on world domination or more earthbound blackmailers, thugs and gangsters—[Anthony] went through more shirts than the Hulk” (Smith).

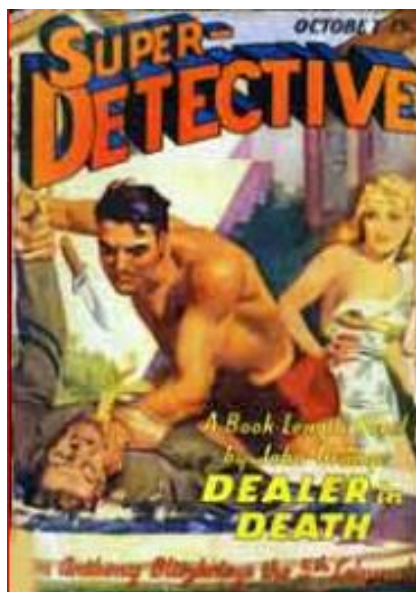


Fig. 3. Smith, Kevin Burton. “Jim Anthony.” *Thrilling Detective*, 18 Mar 2018,

<https://thrillingdetective.wordpress.com/2019/03/18/jim-anthony/>.

David Return has some brief fisticuffs at the end of two tales but relies mostly on intellect to apprehend the bad guys. Plus, he has an appealing rookie uncertainty that differs from the superior aspect Eagels presents to the world and that Eagels only briefly lets down when his assistant is shot. Likewise, Anthony is an omnipotent fantasy character rather than a man with whom readers can empathize; he never betrays an instant of doubt. Hillerman would hit this balance between supposedly manly competence and uncertainty just right with his young Jim Chee character, perhaps one reason his series sustained momentum when the more macho

protagonists of his contemporaries could not find such a loyal audience. Readers would have to wait until the 1990s to encounter female Indian detectives, though female characters have all along provided male protagonists the excuse to reflect on femininity and display masculinity.

Although Anthony precedes Wellman's creation by six years, perhaps those superhero attributes keep him from claiming the title of first Indian detective often conferred on David Return by people unaware of Taylor's or Knox's even earlier efforts. Perhaps it is Anthony's mixed heritage in contrast to Wellman's "full-blooded Tsihah" character. Setting may also factor into Wellman's more common recognition as a trailblazer; David Return does his sleuthing on a reservation, while Anthony lives in a New York penthouse and whisks around the planet on a giant Douglass seaplane (though it has the Indian name Thunderbird II), Eagels stalks foggy London alleys, and Phil Scott patrols the Bramley estate and its environs. Anthony also lived in a pulp magazine much like those Indian scout/detectives of the 1880s and 90s dime novels rather than in a more literary venue like *The Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* (itself a pulp magazine and surely looked down upon as mere "genre fiction" by literary snobs). Anthony is a fairly obscure figure now, but even if he were more widely known, he might not be "Indian enough" to bump David Return from first place on many lists of Indian detectives. The cover art above and other examples do not mark Anthony in any way as "Indian." He looks like any other pulp man of action besides the bronze-hued Doc Savage, bronze not because of Indian or any other particular ancestry, but probably only so he can carry the awesome tagline "Man of Bronze." Doc Savage also influenced characters much better known than Anthony; Superman's creators would call their hero the "Man of Steel," give him the same first name Clark, and nick the idea of an arctic fortress (Grand).

Doc Savage imitator Anthony was obviously much less durable than the Man of Bronze or the Man of Steel, but he went through two incarnations during his brief career. Off-Trail Publications in 2008 published a “flip book” (it can be turned over and rotated so that there are, in effect, two front covers with two stories each reaching halfway through the book) containing two Jim Anthony novels, one from each phase of his crime-fighting career. Veteran pulp writer Victor Rousseau penned 1940’s *Legion of Robots* and likely most of the other early super hero Anthony adventures. With war unleashed in Europe and Asia and the Pacific, the tale’s xenophobia is not surprising but still disquieting. Anthony’s Eastern European-named nemesis Rado Ruric, identified by Chapter 1’s title as “The World’s Arch-Criminal,” plots to disrupt American military/industrial production. An expatriate German scientist, Dr. Guttman (always preceded in the text with an italicized *Herr*, accentuating his suspect origins) has developed a serum that turns people into automatons with super strength (the “Robots” of the title), and a way to bleach the supposed racial identifiers of Ruric’s Hindu assassins, one of whom swears “by Allah” (64). It’s the ultimate form of “passing.” Guttman remakes one of the assassins into a Swedish sailor named Larsen, another into Morales the Mexican, and a third into Dovak the Hungarian, all legal immigrants (79), and Ruric looses them upon Navy shipyards. Another Ruric Hindu accomplice infiltrates Anthony’s Southwest retreat as a blond-haired blue-eyed waiter named Carl, and one more impersonates fictional San Rosario’s dictator Ramon Perez. Anthony develops special battery-powered “Z-ray” eyeglasses (93) immigration officials can use to detect Guttman’s process, protecting America from this ultimate threat to stable ethnic identities. Of all the foreigners in *A Legion of Robots*, in disguise or not, only Anthony’s British butler Dawkins gets an approving treatment, and even he engages in subterfuge, faking a Cockney accent to hide a prior career in international espionage.

Against this backdrop of untrustworthy Europeans, South Americans, and “Hindus,” Anthony stands as the “*embodiment of young American manhood, with all its ideals and ambitions, its spirit and heritage,*” according to Trojan Publishing promotional copy (5, italics in original). That this All-American has Irish and Comanche lineage marks a change in conceptions of “American” since the days of Phil Scott, when Comanche or Irish blood would likely *disqualify* an individual as the embodiment of anything American. This 1940s text celebrates a melting pot version of American, of course excluding those Euro-Nazis and Communists and disguised Hindus. Just as patriots dressed as Indians to steep Boston Harbor in English tea, at a time of threats from abroad “Indian” signifies Native American *and* native American. Predictably, Anthony comes by his Indian ancestry maternally. As the infatuated Linda Tabor, newly arrived in Manhattan from Tall Corn, Iowa, walks by Anthony’s Waldorf-Anthony Hotel, the narrator relates that she knows Jim Anthony’s life story just like every other American girl:

She knew that his father had been Shean Boru Anthony, that wild Irishman who had moulded the destinies of half a dozen South American countries, that explorer of unknown lands from the tundras of the Antarctic to the hot steamy hell of the tropics. She knew that his mother had been Fawn Johntom, the last princess of the Comanches. And she knew that all the better traits of two civilizations had come into being with Jim Anthony. (26)

Luckily, Shean Boru Anthony arrived just before the world ran out of Comanche princesses. Anthony’s readers might accept the notion of Comanche princesses without a raised eyebrow, but the idea that a white woman would fall for a Comanche *prince* or any Comanche man would likely be too hard for them to swallow in 1940. Shean and Fawn’s child is not a Superman from

another planet but a distillation of knowledge and abilities from many terrestrial sources: “At fourteen Jim Anthony had the brain of a Phi Beta Kappa man—and was not aware of it. His Comanche grandfather, Mephito, taught him things which could never be learned in books. The greatest savants of the Orient, the finest teachers of the Continent, all contributed to his education” (26). It is encouraging that Anthony’s appeal as a role model for young readers rests on his learning as well as his physical prowess and the worship of countless Linda Tabors.

Rousseau scatters reminders of Anthony’s Native American heritage throughout the novel. Jim’s Catskills secret base is called The Teepee. His Southwest retreat is named The Pueblo, a proto-Las Vegas with “swimming pools and golf courses, short but tricky . . . modern shops and stores, theaters, ball rooms, everything the modern playboy or playgirl could possibly want to amuse himself in a vacation paradise” (75). Unlike his All-American grandson, Mephito is a caricature of the exotic medicine man, his moniker perhaps meant to conjure the German demon Mephistopheles rather than echo any real Comanche names. He first appears squatting over a “nine stick fire,” “his beady eyes half closed, feeding monstrosities, dried frogs, adder’s tongues, mandrake roots and the like to the flames, while a strange chanting mumble jumble issued from his blue lips” (30). With his magic Mephito divines the future and warns Jim about danger. The few times the Comanche elder utters dialogue he speaks Hollywood Indian, as when he breaks up an altercation between Anthony sidekick Tom Gentry and butler Dawkins: “Ugh! Fight no good! Jim Anthony spank two of you. You, small man, put gun away; you, big man, vamoose!” (82). In the final scene, as the Anthony gang is brought together and the robot attack on The Pueblo is defeated, Mephito is “as inscrutable as ever” (104).

While we readers can only wonder at Mephito’s interior life, we are occasionally privy to the stoic (he is an Indian, after all) Jim Anthony’s inner workings. Anthony navigates not only

by logic and the knowledge gained through his exemplary education, but also by a sixth sense. When he first meets the counterfeit Ramon Perez, “jungle instinct, forest instinct arose in Jim Anthony! The same instinct that warns the beast when the trap is near” (35). We soon learn the source of this primal awareness when Anthony bicycles (all motor vehicles having been disabled by Rado Ruric’s chemical dust) toward *Herr* Doctor Guttman’s San Rosario “*hacienda*”: “He pedaled on into the moonlight, his agile brain afire with his thinking and—call it hunch. For again that inheritance of the forests passed down to him through his mother, Fawn Johntom, was at work” (50). Anthony combines the best of two civilizations, and his Indian side supplies the more intuitive and even supernatural faculties of Super-Detective Jim Anthony’s mind.

Ceding the superhero business to the comic books that were enticing young readers away from pulp novels, Trojan Publishing Corporation, after ten fantastic Jim Anthony tales, recast their protagonist for an older audience. As John Wooley explains in his introduction to the 2008 reprint, Anthony was “more detective and less super than he’d been just a couple months before. Gone was the Doc Savage-esque high-adventure superheroism, replaced by more realistic settings and characters—or, at least, the kind of realism portrayed in the hard-boiled detective stories of the day” (5). Only sidekick aviator Tom Gentry followed Jim in this new incarnation, so there is no wise and mystical Comanche grandfather peering into the future and issuing alerts. New writers Robert Leslie Bellem and Willis Todhunter Ballard, working under the “John Grange” pseudonym, get the Indian references out of the way early. We find out in Chapter II as Jim dines in his Waldorf-Anthony hotel that it is not the elegant dress or perfect physique alone that make Jim a “striking figure”: “it was his face that attracted and held your attention. Sun-bronzed under sleek black hair, the nose jutting, the cheek bones high, the dark eyes hawk-like and penetrating, it was a face that reminded you of some American Indian chieftain—which was

natural enough, for Jim's mother had been a full princess of the Comanche tribe" (17). Two pages later, Jim's special Indian danger detector begins tingling: "he felt a subconscious premonition of danger inching through him; a warning sensation such as he always experienced at the approach of peril. The weird sixth sense was another of his heritages from his Indian mother; it had never failed him in the past and he could not ignore it now" (19). And that's the last we hear about Jim as an Indian even though the plot unfolds over eight more chapters. Bellem and Ballard have checked the Indian box as they took over the Jim Anthony franchise but are much less interested in developing or even maintaining those elements of the character. Judging from *Murder's Migrants* (one of two Jim Anthony tales reprinted by Off-Trail Publications in 2008), the longest-running Indian detective before Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn had left behind most of his Indian character, or at least signs of his supposed Indianness, in the makeover into hard-boiled detective.

And soon after *Murder's Migrants* the Jim Anthony saga would come to a close; the last Anthony novel went to press in October 1943. The attempt to retool the Anthony character for an older audience and thus replace those readers lost to comics had failed, and new youth market competitors besides comics had emerged: "The pulps were dying *en masse*, and paperback books and TV were coming on hard" (Wooley 10). In fact, Wellman's and LaFarge's venue, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, was one of the few pulps to survive this onslaught and continues to offer readers victims, clues, and gumshoes to this day. Comics and paperbacks would present countless Indian characters, but I don't know of any writer picking up the Eagles/Jim Anthony/David Return mantle until the 1970s. But an Indian detective broke into one of those competing media in the late 1950s.

Uncle Sam Buckhart

Michael Ansara starred as Apache U.S. Deputy Marshal Sam Buckhart in NBC's *Law of the Plainsman* for only the 1959-60 season, reprising a role he had played in two guest appearances on *The Rifleman*. The dark-complexioned, dark-haired Syrian-American Ansara stands in a long line of non-Indian actors portraying Indian characters on screen. Indeed, Ansara had just completed a two-year stint as another Apache, Cochise, in the television series version of the hit movie *Broken Arrow* (1950). Ansara would even go on to depict perhaps the ultimate swarthy Other, the Klingon Kang, in three different Star Trek series. *Law of the Plainsman* joined a stampede of television Westerns, the genre reaching peak saturation in 1959-60, with 30 series competing for viewers and seven of the top ten most-watched programs (Nowalk), which helps explain *Law of the Plainsman*'s unusual premise. Just as the demand for dime novel content spurred variations on a formula such as *Phil Scott*, the desire to ride the horse opera's popularity drove television executives to green-light a wide range of cowboy heroes to ride the range, including exactly one Indian cowboy, the Apache lawman Sam Buckhart (the earlier *Brave Eagle*, broadcast on CBS in the 1955-56 season, featured an "Indian" Indian protagonist). As the first Native American detective protagonist broadcast to a mass audience and a figure receding from cultural memory, Buckhart warrants an extensive discussion in this study.

Buckhart does not spring from any bicultural union like Phil Scott, Eagels, and Jim Anthony, so viewers are spared assessments of which inheritance contributes which of his qualities or capabilities. But Buckhart's backstory pushes him toward the assimilated pole of the Dialectic of Diversity. As a child, Buckhart rescued a U.S. soldier, who later willed him a

considerable sum of money with the proviso that the young Indian use it to gain a (white) education. Buckhart earns a Harvard degree, and then he returns to New Mexico to become an officer of the law.

Michael Ray Fitzgerald sees Sam Buckhart as an evolution of *The Lone Ranger*'s Tonto character and notes their similar origin stories, but Buckhart does not go on to ride alongside the white man he saved:

Plainsman might be thought of as a sequel of sorts to *The Lone Ranger*—along the lines of, say, *Son of Tonto*, in which the Indian sidekick gets a promotion, along with the requisite white horse. *Plainsman* seems to be based on the premise: What might happen were the Ranger to disappear? Would Tonto carry on the fight for law and order? What if the Ranger and Tonto were combined into one character? (78)

Ward Churchill has made the same point about Hillerman's Navajo detectives:

with the Hillerman mystery novel as his vehicle, Tonto demonstrates that his polished self-denigration and subservience has at last prepared him, the Indian, to assume the Ranger's mantle, proving once and for all that he too can be "just as good" ("civilized") as his master ever was. The latter can thus retire from the long, lonely, and often brutal toil of imposing the hallowed virtues of rational order upon a world filled with the irrational evils of disorder. (80)

Fitzgerald reads *Law of the Plainsman* in a Cold War context in that it reassures domestic and foreign critics of America's racial oppression that minority members who assimilate can succeed (90-1). Fitzgerald, however, contrasts the politics of the two series; while *The Lone Ranger* represented a right-wing, vigilante skepticism toward government institutions (the Lone Ranger is "lone" both in the sense that he is the sole survivor of his troop and in that he operates outside

official law enforcement), *Law of the Plainsman* “endorses the federal government and its law-enforcement officers” (78). The “Law” in *Law of the Plainsman* means U.S. government authority, as the series takes repeated pains to show. If David Return sought to reconcile sheriff’s star and Indian pipe, Sam Buckhart manages just fine with the star alone.

Law of the Plainsman softens its radical gesture of presenting an Indian with a marshal’s badge by immediately reducing any threat by association with movie and television Indians bent on terrorizing white settlers. When Buckhart first rides onscreen as the star of his own series in “Prairie Incident” (October 1, 1959), he consoles a distraught and distrustful young white girl who has witnessed her father’s murder, and spends much of the rest of the 1959-60 television season convincing white characters to trust or respect him (or at least respect his badge and what it represents). Buckhart buries the victim and begins to walk away, but when he notices the orphaned Tess lingering by the gravesite, he offers, “I could say a few words.” Tess nods, and Buckhart intones, “we return this body to the earth from which it came. This spirit we return to thee, commending it to thy great and everlasting love. Amen.” Tess is not satisfied—“Went so quick like. Don’t hardly seem enough”—so Buckhart recites Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” In a much later episode, “Dangerous Barriers” (March 10, 1960), Buckhart surprisingly sustains only a “crack on the head” from an attack, and his superior Marshal Morrison remarks, “I don’t know if it was one of your saints or mine, but someone was taking care of you.” Harry Kronman wrote both episodes (in fact, the only two he penned for *Law of the Plainsman*), so the normal rotation of screenwriters does not explain any apparent inconsistency over Buckhart’s religion. Perhaps Morrison is unsure of his best deputy’s faith, or perhaps Kronman lost track of Buckhart’s creed as he worked on many other television projects. Whether or not Buckhart is Christian, the series’ debut immediately marks him as knowledgeable

about Christianity, and perhaps faithful to that creed, or at least sensitive to the young girl's needs in her grief.

Just as *Law of the Plainsman* resembled a multitude of other television Westerns, its protagonist hewed closely to the archetype of the Western lawman in the young Apache Buck Heart's transformation into Deputy Marshal Sam Buckhart, but the program provides its hero exotic touches as it calibrates the Dialectic of Diversity. For instance, Buckhart dresses cowboy but foregoes the 10-gallon hat in favor of a headband to keep his long, black hair off his forehead. In trying to gain Tess's confidence so he can take her someplace safe, Buckhart asks "are you still afraid of me?" and explains his long hair and bandanna: "Maybe it's because I wear my hair like this. Believe me, it's only because I love *my* father, out of deference to his race." Tess replies, "you talk funny," and Buckhart laughs and adds, "well, that's out of deference to Harvard. That's a school, and I went there to learn." Buckhart's Ivy League education is itself exotic in contrast to many of the unschooled settlers and ruffians he meets (as well as to many viewers of a network television Western), but that Harvard background marks him as assimilated to the white world and its values, and we hear little more throughout the series about Buckhart's upbringing as an Apache, let alone meet any of his kin; he does not wear the headgear out of deference to "our" race. To remind viewers that Buckhart *is* an Apache and not just some lawman with a fancy degree, Buckhart's boss Marshal Morrison dispatches one of his men to protect Tess at Buckhart's boarding house with the warning "you let something happen to that kid, Sam will stake you out on an anthill [claps Buckhart affectionately on the back] . . . and I'll help him." And when Buckhart faces down the two killers in Tess's father's barn (with Tess hiding from them to ratchet up the suspense), he shoots out the only lantern and responds to the ringleader's taunt "still two against one, Buckhart" with "you're forgetting something. I can see

just as well in the dark. I can also smell you. Scared men always give themselves away. They stink with fear.” But besides some scenes displaying Buckhart’s tracking skills and extra Indian stealth in creeping up on criminals, the series mostly refrains from giving Buckhart special Indian powers. Other than receiving the occasional racial slur, Buckhart thinks and acts like the other Western lawmen crowding television sets at the end of the 50s.

Though Buckhart has done everything possible to learn and serve the dominant culture, he must constantly work for white approval even when his duties and sense of what is right put him at odds with white characters. His rapidly evolving relationship with Tess in the first episode illustrates this dynamic almost allegorically. Buckhart’s boarding house matron bursts in to Morrison’s office to inform the lawmen that Tess is missing, but reassures Buckhart that the killers did not nab the only witness to their crime: “Sam, it wasn’t them. They didn’t take her. She was gone. She took the wagon, Sam.” When Morrison asks why, Buckhart snarls “Me! She was running from *me!*” and pumps his fist. In the very next scene (compression rules these half-hour television program narratives), Tess will reverse course. When the two murderers return that night to Tess’s father’s barn to retrieve their hidden loot, one of them notices an additional horse in the stall and does his own detecting: the horse is sweaty and still wearing a harness, so the criminal remarks to his partner “strike you that’s a mighty cruel way to stable good horses . . . unless you can’t do no better? Unless you’re a kid? Now where else would a kid run to except home?” Buckhart enters the barn, confronts the two men, and calls out “Tess, you here?” Tess springs out of hiding behind the villains, runs between her would-be captors, exclaims “Mr. Sam!” and jumps into Buckhart’s arms. After the more skittish perpetrator tries to surrender and gets shot in the back by his partner, Buckhart guns down the remaining villain and himself gets hit in the hand by a bullet. Tess offers to care for the injured Sam: “Pa learned

me good about things like that. I can fix it.” She smiles and adds, “when we get home.”

Buckhart draws Tess into a one-armed hug and echoes “when we get home.”

Law of the Plainsman goes even further than *Phil Scott* to make its protagonist the protector of white women, for Buckhart adopts the orphaned Tess, though Buckhart’s boardinghouse owner Martha, a white woman, does the bulk of the child-raising as Buckhart ventures out of Santa Fe on his missions. Tess mostly serves to humanize Sam in heart-warming opening and closing scenes, though Buckhart periodically parents. For example, in “The Dude” (December 3, 1959), Buckhart gives Tess a dictionary, and when she asks “is it a story?” he explains, “you might say that. It’s the story of our language.” Sam Buckhart shares much more than the English language with the white characters, and his guardianship of Tess proves he can be trusted to raise her as a proper white woman.

While Sam Buckhart solves crimes and apprehends villains like Phil Scott and Eagels before him, the series is not a whodunit. Most episodes begin with the crime or a revelation of the perpetrator, so the viewer’s pleasure derives from following Buckhart as he surmounts difficulties to get his man. At around 25 minutes running time, each episode only has room for a series of complications leading to at least one dramatic showdown, often before Buckhart returns home for bonding with his young white charge Tess. Most episodes operate as compact morality tales, working in debates about justice. *Law of the Plainsman* especially sounds the alarm for the threats tyranny (whether imposed by powerful individuals or mobs) and vigilantism present to democracy and the rule of law.

In “The Dude,” a young Easterner sporting pince-nez spectacles rolls into the town of Horsefly and informs Buckhart “around these parts I’m generally known as, uh, ‘The Dude.’” Buckhart tries his best to keep the stranger from getting pounded by the local bully, who

introduces himself to Buckhart as the town's unofficial authority: "Boys ain't got around to naming one [a constable] yet. I do what I can to keep order. Name's Strelling, Trigger to my friends." The name "Trigger" suggests Strelling's impulsive nature, and he is in no way suited to "keep order." Buckhart refuses to shake Strelling's proffered hand, denying his self-proclaimed authority.

That night Buckhart shares a hotel room with the out-of-towner to protect him, and The Dude recognizes Buckhart as a fellow Harvard alumnus, indeed, a famous one: "you're a legend back there! That night raid of yours on President Elliot's office during Alumni Week! Oh, magnificent!" After the stranger shows up the next morning in (literally) outlandish Ivy League athletic garb for his appointed showdown with the much larger Strelling and defeats him in a bare-knuckles boxing match, Buckhart looks down on the fallen Trigger and announces, "Strelling, I think this town will be holding an election soon. You'd better be riding." The men gathered to watch the match agree and escort Trigger out of the saloon. And as the Eastern college man mounts to ride out of town, he reveals his identity to Buckhart and the townspeople: "Friend, my real name is Theodore Roosevelt. Call me Teddy." T.R. has come out West to complete his education, to meld the civilized East with the virile frontier, just as Sam Buckhart has done from the opposite direction.

Horsefly is not the only town Buckhart enlightens with democracy. "Clear Title" (December 17, 1959) opens with a shot of a stately two-story ranch home with white pillars holding up its wrap-around porches, and then the camera moves inside to a close-up of an ornate desk with fancy lamp, blotter, and one gold coin. We soon discover that there are other kinds of bullies than the loutish Trigger Strelling. As the camera pulls back to reveal the ranch owner and his henchman behind the desk and an earnest-looking fellow in front, the owner points to the

coin and explains “a gold piece at birth, another one when he enters school, and a third at his marriage,” and his right-hand man Tracey adds “Shannons always take care of their own. You should know that, Stan.” The new father Stan thanks Shannon for “all you’ve done for all of us” but presses for the deed that was promised to his father and vows to go to Santa Fe and enlist legal help to claim his rightful land. In the next scene, Tracey shoots him in daylight before witnesses as Stan tries to leave the Shamrock ranch.

The character “Stan” does not appear in the closing credits, and his widow is only listed as “Helen,” but their last name sounds like “Jakowski.” Perhaps for 1959 television audiences, “Stan and Helen Jakowski” recalled waves of oppressed newcomers to America (including, somewhat ironically, many Irish countrymen of Shannon and Tracey during the series’ 1880s setting). Shannon styles himself a benefactor to his immigrant tenants, and they are too downtrodden to stand up to the tyrant like the doomed Stan until Sam Buckhart arrives to give them their dignity. The doctor, the tenants, and even Stan’s widow are afraid to testify against Shannon and Tracey. When Buckhart tries to assure Helen that “the law will protect” the men who witnessed her husband’s murder, she disagrees: “No, Mr. Shannon’s law will bury them.”

So Buckhart proceeds to the “big house,” where he endures verbal abuse from Shannon: “I’ve been waiting for a marshal to show up. Who pinned a badge on *you*? . . . There must be a shortage of men in government service. Either that, or they’re paying off Indian grants in jobs instead of money.” Buckhart calmly replies, “I don’t think that’s very clever, Mr. Shannon,” and Shannon continues his needling: “Oh, they even taught you how to talk back. Or is that something you learned in your wickiup?” Buckhart places his hand on his pistol grip and declares, “all right, you’ve had your limit of insults. I wouldn’t try for any more. If you can’t show respect for me, show it for the badge,” and Shannon slips in another quick slight: “all right,

Marshal, for the badge.” Shannon scoffs at the idea that Buckhart will produce witnesses to charge Tracey, and schools the Marshal on how things operate in his “world”: “You just ask anybody. Just ask ’em, and they’ll all tell you that Walter Shannon protects his friends. Now in my world, there are only two kinds of people: there are friends, and there are the others. Tracey’s my friend. What are you?”

By the end of the episode, Shannon will be living in Buckhart’s world, as the tenants rally around Stan’s widow, toss their gold pieces at Shannon, and slowly abandon him. As the camera pulls back, Shannon sits atop his horse alone in the Shannonville town square, ranting about how his serfs will never make it without him (fig. 4).



Fig. 4. *Law of the Plainsman*. “Clear Title” (December 17, 1959).

Buckhart later tells his foster daughter that he gave Shannon “something to think about, Tess. Something the people of Shannonville never had before. More valuable than all the gold in the world. A chance to breathe some free air.” For much of the 1959 television audience, these white “slaves” throwing off their shackles to breathe the free air of self-determination surely accorded with their Cold War sense of America as the beacon of freedom. It’s surprising that an Apache pushes Shannon’s whipped tenants into fighting for their future, but not so surprising that the story elides who was breathing that free New Mexican air before the decent and hard-working Jakowskis arrived.

Sam Buckhart chastises another group of terrorized townsfolk for standing up to evil in the *wrong* way. “The Gibbet” (November 26, 1959) refers to a wooden frame for hanging, and the episode wastes no time putting the gibbet to work. Before the opening credits, a mob strings up a man and nails a sign to the gibbet proclaiming in rough lettering

WARNING!

JUSTICE HAS BEEN SERVED

PEOPLES [sic] COMMITTEE

ARROYO SECO N. M.

The hanged man worked for a crime lord named Zeb Dirksen, who holds the town in a grip of fear. Called in to investigate the execution, Buckhart learns that Dirksen has likely staged an “accident” that killed one of the townsfolk in retribution. Buckhart commiserates with the citizens’ plight but strongly condemns their remedy:

SAM. Mr. Keller, I know about your problems with Dirksen. That’s one reason why I’m here.

KELLER. One reason? You name me another.

SAM. Well, I'm also here to prevent you from making a travesty of justice.

KELLER. [disdainfully] Justice.

SAM. You've forgotten the meaning of the word. It happens to be a process of law that fixes the guilt or innocence where it belongs.

And Buckhart later again lays down the law to the beleaguered townsfolk, "maybe before today you had no choice, but now I'm here as a United States Marshal. There'll be no more killings and no more lynchings. Anyone who doesn't see it that way will answer to me," and goes to the local sheriff's office to begin repairing the jail, which, according to a friendly hotel manager fixing to flee the town, "ain't been used much since old Sheriff Anderson got himself killed last year."

In his saloon, Dirksen tries to bribe Buckhart, who tersely responds, "Dirksen, if you knew me you'd put that money back in your pocket." "Chiricahua?" asks Dirksen, and when Buckhart replies "that's right," Dirksen adds, "then maybe I should have offered you a bottle of firewater. That would have been traditional, wouldn't it, Marshal?" Buckhart throws the bottle against the wall and leaves the saloon.

Buckhart's edict to the other warring faction does not hold. He walks into a trap set by the townspeople for Dirksen but shames the men into going home one by one as the leader watches his unsanctioned posse disband. Later the "Peoples Committee" leader Frank Keller, fearing an ambush by Dirksen, mistakenly shoots one of his own allies in the dark. Buckhart shoves Keller (whose last name sounds like "killer" and whose first name carries a tinge of sarcasm) into the cell, lecturing him that "there's one thin line between law and chaos, Keller, and you're looking at it. C'mon!" Keller protests "you know, Marshal, you can't pin a badge on a thievin' Apache," and Buckhart offers this maxim: "When a man sets himself up to be a judge,

he finds himself often judged by the guilty.” Dirksen soon appears at the jail with his own lynch mob and demands Buckhart release Keller to his own “just as legal” committee. Buckhart shoots the advancing Dirksen in the leg, and in an echo of Keller’s earlier abandonment by his Peoples Committee, Dirksen’s men slowly recede into the darkness. As Buckhart leaves town the next day, he tears down the rope from the gibbet.

Buckhart heads off another lynch mob in “The Innocents” (December 10, 1959). To protect Ross Drake, an Easterner accused of murder, from the mob, Buckhart tries to transport the prisoner out of Santa Fe to Albuquerque under cover of darkness, but Drake and his new bride escape from Buckhart. The unhorsed Buckhart meets the lynch mob racing down the trail to apprehend the accused, throws down the head honcho Cully when Cully draws a gun on him, and exclaims, “I told Cully once before to let the law handle this, but you men can’t seem to get it through your skulls. You want to be judge, jury, and hangmen. If that’s what you want, you don’t belong in this territory. [Buckhart gestures toward the hills.] You belong in those caves.” In an ironic twist on the title, the accused reveals himself as guilty by taking a shot at the Marshal when Buckhart catches up to him, and Buckhart kills Drake in self-defense. Even though the mob’s assessment of Drake’s guilt was correct, despite how the episode puts viewers off Drake’s trail, Buckhart’s official brand of justice prevails, with Drake sparing the citizens a trial that would not fit in *Law of the Plainsman*’s half-hour time slot.

Buckhart’s crusade against vigilantism even puts him at odds with his boss in “Appointment in Santa Fe” (November 19, 1959). Buckhart must prevent Marshal Morrison from fulfilling his vow to kill the man who tortured him when he was held in the Confederate Andersonville prison. The prison guard, Santee (a name with unexplained Indian connotations; the Santee Sioux Nation is headquartered in Nebraska) now also serves as a lawman and is

hunting a wanted man, the only other survivor from the 28 in Morrison's Union Army outfit.

Buckhart gets Morrison to admit he's wrong to go outside the law to seek vengeance on Santee:

"What you're saying is that if I use this [looks down at the rifle he's holding] then I ain't no better than he is."

"The Hostiles" (October 22, 1959) provides an odd exception to Buckhart's anti-mob rule. Rather than a recalcitrant (in white eyes) Indian band, the title refers to a group of mountain folk, seemingly transplanted straight from Appalachia. These New Mexico hillbillies are shielding one of their own, Truck Garnett, from The Law's representative, Marshal Buckhart. As Truck's mother explains, "you don't mean nothin' to me. You're a stranger from another world, and I'm just dirt to you. The only time your kind ever comes around here is to bring trouble." Her son is one out-of-control truck, leaving human wreckage in his wake. The family name associates him with the mineral harder than any substance besides diamonds—these are flinty mountain people—but "garnet" is also a red gem, perhaps linking him symbolically with Indians. The Garnetts' "tribe" keep to themselves at the fringes of Buckhart's civilized, law-and-order society. Truck's kinfolk at first surround, disarm, and promise to either expel or kill the Native but foreign threat Buckhart, but when the Marshal informs them that Truck has killed an innocent girl, they perform the series' favorite abandonment scene: Truck unsuccessfully appeals to each of them in succession, but they will have no more truck with the cowardly Truck, so they send Buckhart on his way and execute the craven Garnett. In the episode's denouement, Tess wonders why Sam hasn't brought in his man and asks, "did he fool you?" Buckhart observes, "he thought he was going to, Tess, but he couldn't fool people who knew right from wrong. The only person he fooled was himself." *Law of the Plainsman* is so consistently adamant that vigilantism is wrong, but makes an exception in this case when it holds out the possibility that

some white people can be trusted to look to their better natures for guidance and deliver justice on their own.

“The Matriarch” (February 18, 1960) introduces another odd exception to Buckhart’s code of ethics. As in “Clear Title,” Buckhart enters a world ruled by a powerful rancher, in this case the “matriarch” of the title, Connie Valeri. Like Mrs. Garnett, Valeri tries to protect her dangerous son Dev from the consequences of his cruelty and recklessness (“Dev Valeri” perhaps a play on devilry). In yet another abandonment scene, the townspeople of Valeriville, including Valeri and her trusted manager, a father figure to the spoiled and murderous Dev, stand pat as the wild-eyed scion exhorts them to shoot the unarmed Buckhart. When he tries to wrestle a rifle from his mother, she accidentally shoots him dead. “The Matriarch” closes with Valeri admitting her responsibility for her son’s immature and deformed character: “I want you to know that I loved my son far more than I loved myself. Maybe that’s why I, I never knew how to let go, to let him be his own man. Perhaps it was I he really hated, not the others.” In a jarring note, Buckhart excuses her: “Mrs. Valeri, you gave him love. It’s hard for any mother to put a limit on that. And just as hard for me to think of you in any other way than courageous.” Valeri has done nothing to justify Sam’s judgment that she is “courageous.” Perhaps the series blurs Buckhart’s usually clear distinctions between right and wrong in order to prop up the divinity of (white) motherhood, at least among the higher classes.

Law of the Plainsman mostly skirts matters of who occupied these spaces before Shannonvilles and Valerivilles were platted, but occasionally sidles up to that history. When “Peoples Committee” leader Frank Keller protests Buckhart shutting down the lynch mob intended to purge the town of the evil Dirksen (“The Gibbet”), we get a rare glimpse into Buckhart’s memories. Keller exclaims, “you don’t know what it’s been like. I’ve seen a dozen

men die. Senselessly,” but Buckhart disagrees: “I *do* understand. I saw my whole nation die senselessly.” The men immediately return to present matters with no more comment on Apache history. Michael Ray Fitzgerald detects ambiguity in Buckhart’s solemn pronouncement: “Buckhart does not expound on what he means, but this could be an indictment—of sorts—of U.S. Indian policy. . . . Was the slaughter senseless because it was inhumane—or merely *unnecessary* because the Apaches had already surrendered? If the latter is the case, then, such senseless killing was not unjustifiable, merely uncalled for” (87, italics in original). Fitzgerald even suggests Buckhart could be implicating his own people: “Buckhart himself could be making an admission that his people fought beyond the point where fighting served any rational purpose. Is he suggesting, then, that the Apaches were the senseless ones?” (87). Buckhart does stop short of a clear indictment of U.S. conduct toward the Apaches. Bear in mind, though, that this exchange between Buckhart and Keller lasts but nine seconds in a half hour television program; viewers likely felt sympathy for Sam and regret for his people’s tragedy without thinking hard about the possible ways to parse this word “senselessly.” And despite the very much alive Apache relaying this history, viewers also received yet another confirmation of the myth of the vanishing Indian.

The series offers its most extended meditations on Southwest history with “Dangerous Barriers” (March 10, 1960). We meet another hot-headed scion like Connie Valeri’s boy Dev, but Manuel Ramores’s indignation proves righteous. The white rancher Cass Mabry is trying to force Manuel’s father into selling the last scrap of their once vast holdings. Buckhart’s boss informs him how long the Ramores have been landowners in what would become New Mexico territory:

MORRISON. Family ain't exactly new. Been here for 200 years or more. Got their lands direct from the Spanish king. When they come out, there wasn't nothin' or nobody here." [Tense violins and close-up on Buckhart]

BUCKHART. My people were here. [Walks to far side of room and stands, back turned to Morrison, looking downward]

MORRISON. Now Sam, I meant . . . [rises from chair, walks over to Buckhart, and places his hand on Buckhart's shoulder]. No offense, Sam.

BUCKHART. Forget it.

Buckhart's conciliatory response sounds plausible given the long and close relationship with his professional mentor Morrison, but in the context of this history of dispossession, the colloquial "forget it" is a most unfortunate and perhaps most telling choice of words (fig. 5).



Fig. 5. *Law of the Plainsman*. "Dangerous Barriers" (March 10, 1960).

When Buckhart asks how the Ramores are left with only a tiny portion of their holdings, Morrison reflects “well, there’s always ten ways for losing land for every one way of holding on. Wouldn’t say your people helped much, neither. Burnin’ and killin’ for 200 years.” Buckhart icily proclaims “my people were at war,” and Morrison again tries to make amends: “Now, *Sam*. You gotta understand how I said it. I’m not blamin’, I’m just pointing out.” And Buckhart lets the matter drop. Morrison’s second “now, Sam” notwithstanding, his “just pointing out” does lay blame on the Apaches, and his “ten ways for losing land” also places responsibility on the Ramores themselves, without implicating the Anglo settlers flooding into the territory.

Regarding the American contribution to this fraught history, viewers may be allowed to “forget it,” but they soon meet its spokesman. The bigoted Mabry does not worry about obscuring white (and he certainly does not include Spanish or Mexican in that category) conquest as he offers Buckhart all too familiar arguments for taking possession of the Ramores’ remaining land: “Just ain’t no room for their kind out here.” When Buckhart objects that “they’ve been here a long time, Mabry,” the rancher proclaims white manifest destiny:

Long don’t count! It’s what they done. They had the chance and they never done nothing. You want to know who *made* this country? Us! [Indicates white saloon patrons with a quick gesture of his head.] Men like me, coming out here with our folks when we was kids. Cuttin’ back mesquite and chaparral, scratchin’ for water, gamblin’ everything we had on a few head of cattle. Workin’ in the winter til our hands froze, and in the summer til our skins burned clear through. Don’t you talk to me about long!

And lest viewers think Indians fit into Mabry's America, he later informs Buckhart, "well, now you asked me straight out, I'll tell you straight out: I don't like your kind no better than his [Manuel's]."

Mabry and his two men have already beaten Manuel once to persuade Manuel's father to sell, and will next try to bait the proud and passionate Ramores heir into starting a gun fight that will likely leave him dead or in jail, thus also forcing the land deal. Buckhart attempts to protect him and keep the young man's temper in check, a task complicated by Manuel's own rage against Apaches, as strong as Mabry's various prejudices. Manuel tells Buckhart of returning to the family ranch as a five-year-old with his father to find the hacienda burned, the servants killed, and his mother captured by an Apache raiding party: "I never saw my mother again. I learned to pray that she was dead, too." Manuel distrusts the Apache marshal, and even misconstrues Buckhart's attempts to keep him from confronting Mabry as the law siding with the white rancher.

Buckhart tries his customary argument to work within the legal system, but Manuel will hear none of it, so Buckhart directs his persuasion at the young man's father. Don Esteban would like to keep the land in his family for his son's sake, but has good reason to fear for Manuel's life if they resist Mabry. Over Manuel's protests, Buckhart convinces Don Esteban to bring charges against Mabry and testify that he witnessed the white men beating his son. Don Esteban puts his faith in a legal system that so often historically worked against his people's property rights. We do not get to learn if that faith is misplaced because an off-screen gunman kills Don Esteban when Buckhart leaves him alone for a moment. Manuel reads the execution as more evidence that Buckhart is aligned with Mabry.

Buckhart is angry enough about the murder and Manuel's accusation that he threatens the same brand of vengeance he has crusaded against throughout the series: "Mabry . . . if anything happens to Manuel, I'm coming after you." The underhanded Mabry claims the legal high ground—"You come, you better come with proof"—and Buckhart sternly replies, "with or without proof, I'm coming after you." When Mabry's men injure Buckhart, Manuel reconsiders his estimation of the lawman and agrees to cooperate, directing Buckhart toward the Ramores' lawyer, who will put in writing that Mabry threatened both him and the two Ramores men. Buckhart calls out Mabry on the town plaza: "I told you I'd come for you." Manuel joins Buckhart to even the odds against Mabry and his two bodyguards, and as Apache and Mexican advance on the white rancher, he loses his bravado—"You want to talk it out, I'm as reasonable as the next"—and once again appeals to the law: "Buckhart, you loco? You got no cause. Ain't nothin' happen to that boy." But when Buckhart charges Mabry with the murder of Don Esteban and Manuel confronts him with the lawyer's testimony, Mabry decides to draw, and Manuel and Buckhart shoot the three men in self-defense. Like many series characters who underestimate or denigrate Buckhart, Manuel ends up thanking him and adds, "there is no hate anymore."

"Dangerous Barriers" tiptoes up to the powerful vigilante "you killed my father" theme that animates many Western tales of vengeance without completely abandoning the series' ideological framework: there is that lawyer willing to implicate Mabry, and the avenging Manuel and Buckhart let Mabry draw iron first. The series cheers Buckhart's campaign to advance American jurisprudence over such gun-barrel justice without dwelling on the role of violence in America's expansion, so this episode deserves special credit for broaching the subject and presenting an Apache lawman and a Mexican Hacendado uniting to defeat a crooked, land-grabbing white. But Manuel does not announce he is done only with hating Apaches; his good

will might extend to whites now that these bad ones horning in on his inheritance have been eliminated. Some viewers might have been receptive to Mabry's justifications for possession, that people like him "made" this country while the Indians and Mexicans squandered their chances, but the acting, cinematography, and dialogue all work overtime to paint the rancher as shifty and prejudiced. Fitzgerald argues that Mabry fits a pattern: "By limiting racist animosity to criminals and lowlifes, *Law of the Plainsman* suggests that racism and hatred were not endemic, but rather products of ill-educated, maladjusted individuals. The historical record shows that this was not the case at all" (88). Many future Indian detectives will likewise expose individual white evildoers without calling into question the American government's right to dictate right and wrong or considering widespread systems of oppression.

Besides these flashes of anger in "Dangerous Barriers" and a few other episodes, Sam Buckhart rarely disturbs the national conscience over American expansionism. He is also a "safe" character sexually, not that 1950s primetime television *could* be overtly steamy, but Buckhart foregoes even the tame infatuations with sweethearts so common among his Western protagonist peers. That a young man would dedicate himself to learning his profession instead of pursuing romance is plausible but also convenient, especially in an imaginary New Mexico nearly devoid of other Indians. With Civil Rights activism gaining traction in the 1950s and the integration of schools and other public places increasingly exposing ugly attitudes against the comingling of races, many television creators surely were wary of portraying love and/or sex across racial lines, yet *Law of the Plainsman* flirts with just such a relationship in "Stella" (March 31, 1960). Stella assists her two half-brothers, Cy and Bob Erby, and her reluctant and appropriately-named husband Staff Meeker in robbing a bank, and Sheriff Shep Collins sends to Santa Fe for help catching the desperadoes. Since the Erby boys have been out of the territory

for four years, Sheriff Collins bets they won't know of the Apache Deputy Marshal, and so instructs Buckhart to pocket his badge and, undercover, investigate the Erby family ranch, now run (unprofitably, we soon hear) by Stella and her husband.

When Buckhart arrives, the three men are off to retrieve the loot where the skittish Meeker, afraid to be seen in daylight carrying a bag, had stashed it. Buckhart finds Stella in her barn repairing a horse shoe. Startled to see the large Apache filling the barn door, and unmollified by his smile and polite greeting, Stella tells Buckhart to "git out of here!" and fires her pistol, spooking the horse. Buckhart subdues the bucking horse, keeping Stella from serious injury. She thanks Buckhart and walks around him, sizing him up:

STELLA. You're an Apache, ain't ya? How you come by white man's talk?

BUCKHART. By living among them.

STELLA. You sound like you got a lot of book learnin'.

BUCKHART. Oh, I've had my share. [rolling up sleeves] I'm also a pretty fair

blacksmith. If you like, I'll finish your shoeing for you. A job like that is hardly one for a lady.

The poor and uneducated Stella has likely never been called a "lady" before. She watches with great interest as the muscular Buckhart works the bellows.

Stella fixes dinner for Buckhart, and as they share stories and develop intimacy, Stella lets on that she "done hit the jackpot" and will leave this poor ranch and become "somebody." Stella echoes Mrs. Garnett's and Cass Mabry's sentiments about the hardscrabble homesteading life: "I ain't never been nuthin'. I just knew misery. Hard winters and hot chokin' summers. Why, I'm nigh onto twenty and started dryin' up already." The camera cuts to a close-up of Buckhart, whose smile and quick glance downward from Stella's eyes reveal that he disagrees

with her self-assessment. Stella continues, “you know something, Indian. I ain’t never had a store-bought dress in my whole life.” Despite her offers of more coffee to hold him, Buckhart politely declines and says he must be on his way, keeping their pleasant tête-à-tête from leading into riskier romantic territory, but as Buckhart prepares to mount his horse, Stella confides in him, “you know, you’re the first person who ever talked to me. I mean *really* talked to me” (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. *Law of the Plainsman*. “Stella” (March 31, 1960).

Their bittersweet parting gets interrupted by the returning Erby brothers and her husband, all instantly suspicious of Stella in close conversation with an Indian. What follows is probably the series’ most racially and perhaps most erotically charged scene; I qualify these claims only because I have not been able to view all 30 episodes. Relieving Buckhart of his sidearm and

with his own six-shooter trained on the intruding Indian, Bob Erby sneers, “now just what you doin’ in these parts, Mr. ’pache?” Buckhart, staring intensely into the bank robber’s eyes, offers one of his rare challenges to white American property “rights”: “This is the land of the Apache. Who has more right?” Bob, enraged by Buckhart’s white clothing and “smart-aleck” attitude, directs Buckhart to “take off them clothes, Mr. ’pache, boots and all. . . . Seems to me somebody done spoiled this boy. Time he be reminded what he is,” and his brother Cy fetches a bottle of whiskey to force the half-naked Buckhart to drink because Bob “always did want to see a redskin roarin’ drunk.”

Stella and Buckhart surprise and best the brothers in a brief scuffle, and she tells him to go inside and get dressed while she covers the Erby boys. Buckhart reemerges, his Indian body once again covered by his “white” outfit, this time with Marshal’s badge pinned to the shirt, walks up to Stella from behind, grabs her gun, and places the four robbers under arrest. Stella feels emotionally betrayed: “You’re a lawman? All the time I thought. . . . You was just stringin’ me along! You dirty ’Pache!” Nevertheless, when more fisticuffs erupt, Stella tosses a gun to Buckhart just in time for him to shoot Cy and save himself. Buckhart delivers the surviving three thieves to jail, and Sheriff Collins is surprised to see Stella and Staff Meeker:

COLLINS. We want *those* two?

BUCKHART. They took part in the robbery. They also took *my* part when the chips were down.

COLLINS. Did they, now?

BUCKHART. I’ll be telling just how much at their trial. You take care of them, I’ve got a little errand to do.

COLLINS. Where in tarnation you goin’?

BUCKHART. [smiling] To get a store-bought dress.

Buckhart's gesture provides nice closure for the episode and for his brief relationship with Stella.

The script makes a couple moves to build our sympathy towards Stella. First, she is only a *half*-sister to the reprehensible Cy and Bob, which distances her from the pair, though she does share some of their attitudes toward Indians—before Buckhart arrives, Stella informs Staff that “you ain’t a fit husband for an Indian squaw.” Second, she has married the devoted but weak Meeker not out of any passion but “because I was *alone*, and [he] asked me.” Third, we discover she only wants the money to escape scratching a meager living from the soil and experience the wider sophisticated world Buckhart represents with his fine words and five years back East. And fourth, Buckhart tells Stella “you couldn’t kill a man in a hundred years,” and we realize he is probably right when she surrenders her gun to him. Still, the story places checks on Buckhart and Stella’s relationship to keep it from turning in directions too risqué for network standards or the political climate. Stella is married, which puts her off-limits for Buckhart, the paragon of uprightness. And Stella is a criminal; as Stella accuses Buckhart when he reveals his badge, he may have just been play-acting his regard for her in order better to prosecute his business. But even before Buckhart’s thoughtful errand to purchase her “a store-bought dress,” viewers suspect him of having genuine interest in Stella, and she certainly reciprocates. Mostly *Law of the Plainsman* avoids such romantic or sexual possibilities for Buckhart, whether within or across racial or ethnic lines; Buckhart’s closest female friends are the adopted Tess and his elderly boarding house matron Martha. Just as those uncommon scenes break the mold when he angrily recounts historical and ongoing injustices toward Apaches, “Stella” surprises by hinting at a sex drive for Buckhart. These exceptions underline how careful the series usually is to cast the

imposing, intelligent, and muscular Buckhart character as non-threatening, at least to anybody besides the designated bad guys.

Buckhart faces the ultimate loyalty test to his office and the values it represents in “Blood Trails” (November 5, 1959) when he must track and apprehend a fellow Apache. According to Morrison, the fugitive is “one of the hostiles sent [to Florida] with Geronimo,” and in the opening scene we witness the escaped convict kill two white lawmen trying to collar him. Buckhart recognizes the name Yu-cah-si (my phonetic rendering, since the credits refer to the character by only the English translation “Charlie Wolf”) as a boy he knew in childhood. Buckhart suspects Charlie Wolf remains around Chaco Canyon, the scene of the murders. When Morrison, uncertain if the Apache in the fugitive notice is the culprit, doubts that Wolf could have made it all the way to Chaco Canyon from Florida on his own, Buckhart explains that it was their home before the Chiricahuas moved to the reservation and that “Charlie Wolf was one of the most ruthless and cunning killers ever to earn the name Apache warrior. He believes Chaco Canyon belongs to him and he’ll kill anyone who tries to go there. I’m sure he’d rather die than allow himself to be taken out.” The widow of one of the slain lawmen comes by to visit his old friend Morrison and implores the Apache Deputy Marshal, “Mr. Buckhart, I know you will do the right thing.” And Buckhart accepts the mission, insisting on going alone since “I wouldn’t get within ten miles of him if I didn’t.”

During the ensuing manhunt, Buckhart plays dead after Wolf discharges a round at the empty shirt Buckhart shows from behind his hiding place. Wolf stands over the prostrate Buckhart and brands him a traitor: “Buckhart, you die. You are the Apache who bowed and scraped before the white man’s boot. I, Yu-cah-si, will give you back your honor . . . with an Apache knife.” Buckhart gains the upper hand, and when Wolf insists Buckhart shoot him,

Buckhart declares “No, Charlie Wolf, I will not kill you. You’re going back to face trial according to *law*,” switching to Wolf’s English name after earlier addressing him as Yu-cah-si. Wolf escapes, and Sam tries his best to fulfill his promise to bring Wolf in alive, waiting overnight before smoking the wounded warrior out from the rocks where he is holed up. In their final struggle, Wolf accidentally rolls over on his own knife. Buckhart, wounded in the fray, returns to Santa Fe and the embrace of his adopted white daughter Tess.

Michael Ray Fitzgerald observes the symbolic nature of Charlie Wolf’s demise at the hands of Buckhart: “It is not enough for Buckhart to become fully assimilated into Anglo-American society by defecting and becoming an enforcer of the dominant group’s norms. He must continually *prove* his loyalty, and the best way of doing so is by killing one of his own” (90, italics in original). Buckhart answers Wolf’s charges of collaboration by invoking the rule of American law and even questioning Wolf’s honor:

WOLF. I am your prisoner. You caught me fair. I must honor that or break the Apache law.

BUCKHART. What do *you* know of honor?

WOLF. I am an Apache.

BUCKHART. You *were* an Apache!

Buckhart never gets the opportunity to elaborate on this reasoning; he bends to cut the ropes around Wolf’s legs so they can walk to Santa Fe but receives a kick in the jaw that renders him temporarily unconscious, allowing Wolf to prove his Apache fortitude by burning the ropes from his hands over the campfire and then running off. Viewers feel Buckhart’s frustration trying to take the defiant Wolf alive, but non-Indian viewers don’t likely ponder Buckhart’s claim that Wolf is no longer Apache or take seriously Wolf’s contention that Buckhart is a sellout. The

“bad” Indian has been vanquished, mainstream viewers are relieved their hero, the law-abiding Indian, survives the contest, and any uncertainty Wolf may have introduced over whether to admire Buckhart’s loyalties evaporates in the desert heat.

The creative minds behind *Law of the Plainsman* faced tricky questions over how to fashion their protagonist. I don’t imagine them sitting down in a studio conference room and mulling over how to negotiate the Dialectic of Diversity, but they had to decide how to make Sam Buckhart “Indian” enough without risking alienating the mass of prospective viewers who could easily turn the dial to find a sheriff more in line with their expectations. Apaches or even individuals versed in their history and culture did not, apparently, participate in this decision-making, so the gauge for measuring Indian enough, so often the case with media depictions, would have been other media representations of Indians. In this context, even the more “exotic” signs of Indianness these writers could provide Buckhart would have probably evoked the familiar for a generation of television viewers raised on matinee cowboys and Indians.

Not that Sam Buckhart simply mirrors the cavalcade of Hollywood and television Indians that had gone before him. Casey Ryan Kelly contends that television has sometimes pushed ahead of cinema with its images of Indians: “At some points, television has been more progressive in its portrayals of American Indian characters, more willing to feature native actors and storylines than mainstream Hollywood film.” With few Indian characters onscreen besides the protagonist portrayed by a Syrian-American, *Law of the Plainsman* gets no points on the first measure, and Kelly does not go on to explain just what counts as Indian storylines, but he notes that Buckhart “was an extraordinarily capable Harvard-educated Apache. To gain acceptance, Buckhart—who was deft with a gun and versed in Shakespeare—had to far surpass the low expectations of the program’s white characters. This image is perhaps preferable to hackneyed

stereotypes or invisibility.” I won’t even qualify *my* judge’s score: *Law of the Plainsman* makes a bold statement by offering an Indian hero with legal authority over whites. But that protagonist must play to the expectations of the white characters, as Kelly observes, as well as those of the overwhelmingly white audience, so he lands rather far toward the assimilated end of the Dialectic of Diversity scale. On the front edge of the 1960s, the series sends hopeful and even radical (for the era’s TV) messages that we all share a common humanity under more apparent differences, and even that an Indian could guide us toward better realizing our American ideals of democracy and justice, but I wonder if *Law of the Plainsman* could have garnered ratings good enough to be renewed if Sam Buckhart were a little more different from all the other Western lawmen championing “truth, justice, and the American way” (to quote the resounding climax of *Superman*’s opener, specially added to his credo for the 1950s Cold War television series).

Hawk, John Hawk

The next Indian detective to try to entice those television viewers even more resembles his non-Indian counterparts on competing series, but the template is contemporary urban cop rather than Western marshal policing the 1880s frontier. Burt Reynolds played Lieutenant John Hawk of the New York District Attorney’s office in the ABC series *Hawk*, which aired for only half of the 1966-67 season. If the title did not make the detective’s ethnicity clear enough, a promo spot led with that information after a “Bond, James Bond”-style introduction: “His name is Hawk, John Hawk. He’s a detective on the New York City Police Force. His beat is the canyons of New York after dark. And, oh yes . . . John Hawk is a full-blooded Iroquois Indian.” The “oh yes” and pregnant pause prepare viewers to pay attention when the voiceover announces

this series' twist on the familiar genre. And perhaps to illustrate this heritage (and entice viewers with the promise of action), Hawk throws a knife from an impressive distance at a Gene Hackman character menacing a woman ("1966 Hawk TV Show Promo"). The specificity of Iroquois is a nice touch, even though Iroquois denotes a group of Indian nations, but in the eight episodes that I have been able to view on DVD out of the series' 17 episode run, Hawk's Indian background does not go much beyond a gimmick to differentiate this cop show from competitors. Perhaps I was expecting a fuller engagement with Hawk's experiences as a Native American because Reynolds has Cherokee ancestry and had played the half-Comanche Quint Asper on *Gunsmoke* for three seasons prior to starring in *Hawk*.

Hawk's plotlines are less interesting than *Law of the Plainsman's* for our purpose of understanding the Indian detective figure, but John Hawk's exchanges with other characters help fill in that portrait. Most episodes drop a reference or two to Hawk as Indian, either in an attempt at "buddy" humor among the police, racial prejudice from a character we are meant to dislike, or a serious but brief sociological observation. The program's emphasis, however, lands squarely on the crime and Hawk's attempts to apprehend the perpetrator, with fisticuffs and flirtations along the way, so there is little room to develop Hawk's interior life in just half a season.

Hawk's Indianness comes into play in the little workplace ribbing sessions that convey camaraderie among the police. In "The Theory of the Innocent Bystander" (October 13, 1966), Hawk initiates the banter with a lab technician, who, by the way, appears Asian not German, despite Hawk playfully imitating a German accent and referring to the technician as a German scientist, perhaps calling to viewers' minds stern and officious Nazis of the movies. Hawk commiserates with the technician about the Feds in a sarcastic tone (fig. 7):

HAWK. The FBI will lend us every possible assistance, Herr Doctor.

LAB TECHNICIAN. Well, we could do worse.

HAWK. How?

LAB TECHNICIAN [doing an “Indian” wave]. How.



Fig. 7. *Hawk*. “The Theory of the Innocent Bystander” (October 13, 1966).

A minute after this clever exchange, Hawk announces that he must leave:

HAWK. I gotta move.

LAB TECHNICIAN. Why?

HAWK. Motion is motion even if it slams you into a tree.

LAB TECHNICIAN. I know. It’s an old Iroquois axiom.

Hawk slugs him on the shoulder and walks out the door. The plots keep Hawk in motion most of the time, but there are opportunities for teasing between the interrogations and gunfire. A colleague accuses Hawk of going soft when he tries to shield an informant from a death threat:

DETECTIVE TOM. I don't get it. What do you owe a stool pigeon like Frankie Gellen?

He'd sell you out for a whoopee button.

HAWK. Three years ago I got him off a one to five. I made a deal with the DA. I got him started.

DETECTIVE TOM. He's being paid.

HAWK. Well, maybe it doesn't end there.

DETECTIVE TOM. Chief have'em heap big heart.

HAWK. You have'em heap big mouth.

This time Hawk slaps the jester with a handful of folders, and laughter and lighthearted music ensue as he leaves the room ("The Shivering Pigeon" November 10, 1966).

Maybe these scenes did not fall so flat in 1966 as they do in retrospect, but the show never managed to find a balance between vigilante with a badge and the ensemble family of a police procedural. Hawk's helpers and foils in the department are not memorable; they mostly deliver plot points and an occasional bad joke. Hawk's closest ally is the African-American detective Dan Carter. Having a Native American and an African American cooperate in the District Attorney's office sends a valuable message in 1966, but their personal and professional relationships remain uncertain. When another detective suspects that Hawk is on the take, he approaches Carter for information:

VAL CRILLO. Carter, you're pretty thick with Hawk. What's he working on now?

CARTER. How should I know? He's got his cases, I've got mine . . . *and* you've got yours. Now, if you haven't got enough to do, I've got a whole stack right here that you can help me with, all right? (“‘H’ is a Dirty Letter” December 1, 1966)

Hawk and Carter trust one another and work well together, but there's not much evidence that they are “pretty thick.” Carter's response implies that Crillo, Hawk, and he are peers, yet Hawk routinely tells Carter what to do. The Carter/Hawk partnership does not evolve much beyond Carter running errands and gathering info for Hawk, which may be one reason the series did not develop a larger fan base.

If viewers are meant to be amused by these coworkers' gibes at Hawk's ethnicity, similar lines coming from a different source have a different effect. A woman dissatisfied with Hawk's progress finding her missing daughter hires former cop turned private investigator Nick England to do the job right, which means pinning the crime on the girl's college dropout, salvage worker boyfriend. England's attempts to muscle a confession out of the boyfriend and manufacture evidence against him outrage Hawk, and England's barbs reinforce the audience's judgment against England. He antagonizes Hawk with “you're never gonna make heap big chief reading the small print, fella”; “you gonna play games forever, Big Chief?”; and “just hold your tomahawk, fella” (“Game with a Dead End” September 29, 1966). The derogatory way England delivers these lines matters to Hawk more than their actual content.

Hawk shows himself to be a good sport, depending on who's cracking an Indian joke and to what purpose, but he does not have much interest in discussing his Native American ancestry despite how prominently the show's promo features it. A woman asks him, “Hawk, what is that, an Indian name?” Hawk immediately shuts down the topic with the retort, “Matilda Mulroy, what kind of a name is that?” (“Wall of Silence” December 22, 1966). Hawk has a playful

exchange with another woman on a picnic, but abruptly moves the conversation away from his heritage:

MARY WHEELIS. I can't believe you don't bring a different girl here every week.

HAWK. You don't know the girls I work with.

MARY WHEELIS. Obviously, you're the wrong kind of a cop. You ought to ride a horse in Central Park.

HAWK. You've never seen me on a horse. All Indians don't ride well.

MARY WHEELIS. Are you an Indian?

HAWK. Yeah.

MARY WHEELIS. Are you really?

HAWK [smiling]. Yes, I *really* am."

MARY WHEELIS. Now I know why you're so strong and silent.

HAWK [looking downward] Yeah.

And Hawk immediately begins interrogating Mary Wheelis about some missing collectible books. Hawk pokes fun at one Indian stereotype, but when Mary invokes another, he redirects the discussion ("The Longleat Chronicles" September 15, 1966). Hawk, if not as impassive as many screen Indians, is generally uncomfortable discussing himself and particularly keen to avoid speaking to his experiences as an Indian. As a District Attorney's investigator, he would much rather ask questions than answer them.

One episode dangles some family history without spelling out the Indian context for viewers. In "The Man Who Owned Everyone" (October 20, 1966), Hawk takes on a corrupt construction magnate who once tried to bribe Hawk's father to take the blame for a building

collapse that killed eight men, including Hawk's uncle. From his childhood, Hawk recalls the rich man's representative's visit:

My father had a lot of time then because he didn't have a job. Alpert came in, and sat down, and offered him \$1500. He said, "all you have to do is say everything was your fault." He said, "you're just a construction worker, and nobody really cares. All you have to say is everything is your fault and we'll give you all the money, and we'll take care of you from now on, and you'll be a rich Indian."

Hawk's father refuses, and Hawk observes that "all we had in the house at the time was 37¢." The story shows Hawk's pride in his father's moral strength, as well as the distance Hawk has traveled from poverty to professional career, a journey TV viewers would have to imagine if it even occurred to them to think about it. For the plot's sake, it is only necessary for the audience to feel Hawk's personal stake in taking down "The Man Who Owns Everyone"—except Hawk and his father. I understand this is ABC in 1966 and not PBS or The History Channel, but there could have been time for a line or two about the Indian ironworkers (more specifically Mohawk rather than collectively Iroquois) so important to creating the New York City skyline. It would have been an economical way to connect the character to Native American communities. At least Hawk's childhood memory suggests how his family ended up in the city and what guided him toward a career apprehending wrongdoers. It is a rare longitudinal glimpse into this character who acts and reacts from moment to moment in an action series.

In my eight episode series sample, Hawk has no obvious contact with other Indians, and his feelings toward his Indian heritage are mixed. He remains silent as his superior, Assistant D.A. Ed Gorton, metaphorically attributes Hawk's success in apprehending criminals to his Indian tracking ability: "You've got that fine Iroquois instinct of holding your head low, haven't

you? You pick up the scent of your enemy, you track him, you lose him. . . . You're biding your time now" ("The Man Who Owned Everyone" October 20, 1966). But another time, Hawk tries to explain a less favorable stereotype:

COZY NEFF. Whatsa matter, Chief?

HAWK. Nothing.

COZY NEFF. Don't you ever smile?

HAWK. Well, it's uh . . . it's an ethnic hang-up. You see I come from a long line of losers. We don't have a lot to smile about.

COZY NEFF. Well, you're a winner now. You can buy back Manhattan. ("H' is a Dirty Letter" December 1, 1966)

To be fair, Hawk is pretending to be a crooked cop (Neff is referring to a package of heroin they've just recovered), so it is not clear if this comment reflects Hawk's true attitude. He does not go out of his way to celebrate Red Pride, but in another episode, he rejects the charge that he is ashamed of being Indian but resents being pushed toward representing Indians in ways others expect. In this exchange, Hawk's boss worries about the repercussions of holding an informant for his own protection without charging him:

SACHER. I don't want any headlines screaming rape of civil liberties.

HAWK. There won't be.

SACHER. Oh, I guess not. With your background, you're extra sensitive to that, aren't you?

HAWK. What's my *background* got to do with it?

SACHER. Now don't bristle. Actually, I envy you your background, it's a very rich heritage. You should do more with it, not try to play it down. A man can't be ashamed of what he is.

[pause]

HAWK. Is that what you think I am, ashamed of it? What do you want me to do, walk around here with moccasins on, sit at my desk beating a tom-tom?

SACHER. Listen, Hawk, the Commissioner likes you, even the DA approves of your instincts if not always your methods. I'm a man likes to make up his own mind ("The Shivering Pigeon" November 10, 1966).

The boss gets the last word, so we don't hear any more from Hawk on these complicated matters of how to be Indian in this workplace setting and whether an Indian perspective shapes his ideas about right and wrong.

Lieutenant John Hawk appears thoroughly assimilated, which is fine—there's no requirement that he emphasize his Indianness, though the series does remind viewers a couple times in most episodes that Hawk is an Indian, and it is too bad that the writers did not explore Hawk's Indian identity in greater depth. Hawk is an "edgy" character, but not in a Native American activist mode. He brings criminals to justice and battles against corruption and complacency in the police force but does not base his moral authority on his Indian identity. Rather than a moral compass, Hawk's Indian background provides the character with a countercultural cachet.

Burt Reynolds actually joked about that cachet 46 years later when he appeared as himself in the FX Network's animated spy spoof *Archer*. When Archer declares they'll never

catch up to his colleagues who are being pursued across New York City by three van loads of Cuban assassins, his idol Burt Reynolds, behind the wheel, disagrees:

BURT REYNOLDS. We'll catch them. I know a shortcut.

ARCHER. What? How?

BURT REYNOLDS. I did a TV series here called *Hawk*.

ARCHER. I forgot about *Hawk*!

BURT REYNOLDS. He was part *Indian*.

ARCHER. Right!

Cartoon Burt Reynolds leans slightly forward, squints, and draws out the word “Indian” for comic emphasis (“The Man from Jupiter” January 19, 2012). The “part Indian” comment is almost a non-sequitur, unless Reynolds is invoking the Indian as super tracker theme. It is more that Reynolds and Archer have a macho bonding moment over the agreement that an Indian detective is cool, but Hawk’s Indianness seems an add-on bonus in this short gag. Hawk’s Indian background, indeed, was an interesting twist on the cop formula, even though its potential was never realized. In fact, Reynolds would go on to play a similar protagonist for one season, 1970-71, in *Dan August*, a police lieutenant without the Indian ethnicity. *Hawk*, as with the earlier *Law of the Plainsman*, illustrates how demand for content drove innovation *within* imitation, just as in the days of *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective*, only the primetime television menu had shifted from Westerns toward Cop Shows by the mid-1960s, and the networks offered dozens of variations besides *Hawk* on the crime drama: *Ironside*, the disabled former police chief; *Columbo*, the disheveled detective; *Honey West*, the female private eye; young counter-culture sleuths in *The Mod Squad*; *The Outsider*, the ex-con detective; another rehabilitated

prisoner, *T.H.E. Cat*, for Thomas Hewitt Edward Cat, the Gypsy cat burglar turned bodyguard, etc.

Navajo Joe, a spaghetti Western released the same year (1966) as *Hawk* with Burt Reynolds in the title role, though not a Mystery, points the way toward a more successful setting for the Indian detective. Joe demands a dollar a head for every man to protect the Esperanza City townspeople from a murderous outlaw band, plus the reward for the outlaws and “one other thing.” He prods the Sheriff’s badge with his rifle barrel, and the Sheriff objects:

SHERIFF ELMO REAGAN. But you can't [be a sheriff], an Indian sheriff? The only ones elected in this country are Americans.

JOE. My father was born here, in the mountains. His father before him and his father before him and his father before him. Where was your father born?

REAGAN. Ulp, what has that to do with it?

JOE: I said where was he born?

REAGAN. Uuh, in Scotland.

JOE. My father was born here, in America. His father before him and his father before him and his father before him. Now which of us is American?

And Joe removes the star from the Sheriff’s vest and claims it for himself.

Nakia, the New New Mexico Indian Lawman

Television made another attempt in 1974 to score a hit with an Indian detective. *Nakia*’s protagonist contemporizes the Sam Buckhart character: Deputy Nakia Parker patrols modern New Mexico. This time the Indian lawman is Navajo rather than Apache. As with Sam Buckhart, Nakia’s warmth comes out in scenes with a young companion, his mop-haired twelve-

year-old nephew Half Cub, and Nakia has an older white mentor in Sheriff Sam Jericho, reminiscent of the Sam Buckhart/Marshall Andy Morrison dynamic. Another non-Indian actor, Robert Forster, played the title character.

Probably all television pilots are launched with blessings and incantations, but the television movie *Nakia* (April 17, 1974) literally begins with a prayer. As a rider navigates the rugged Southwestern landscape, accompanied by forceful brass and dignified strings, a voiceover chants, “Great Mystery, you existed from the first. The sky, this earth, you created. Great Mystery, look upon me. Pity me, that my people may live.” After half a minute more of trail riding, stately theme music, and credits vaguely resembling the weathered, yellow-red rocks in the background, the plea resumes, but with a subtle variation: “Great Mystery, you are mighty. Pity me, that the people may live.” Viewers will soon connect this voice to Nakia Parker, who we discover is returning from prayer in the mountains. They likely do not notice this shift from “my people” to “the people,” but much of the pilot’s drama hinges on who are Nakia’s people, and how may he best serve them.

Nakia’s first encounter with crime paints him as the defender of Indians against white intruders. He happens upon three white men rustling a cow on “Indian property,” as Nakia points out. When the out-of-uniform Deputy Sheriff does not heed their suggestion to move along and mind his own business, they attack him. Nakia quickly bests the three in the scuffle and then delivers them to the county jail. But after visiting the wife of one of the would-be cattle thieves and witnessing the family’s poverty-stricken lives, Nakia bends protocol to have the men released, advising them, “the next time you want some meat, shoot yourself some rabbits.” Much later, this good turn comes back to help him when the husband searches for the missing Nakia and finds him crawling with no food or water along a desert road after a land developer’s

henchmen have beaten him. Nakia's concern for "my people" does not bias him against non-Indians or keep him from helping a white man down on his luck and trying to feed his family.

For its central plot, *Nakia* stages a showdown between a group of historical preservationists lead by Diane Little Eagle and some townspeople excited by the promises of Chicago real estate developer Alva Chambers. The fate of a Spanish mission hangs in the balance; Little Eagle's earnest activists envision a cultural learning center housed in the mission while Chambers and his allies seek to bulldoze the long-abandoned mission and build an industrial park. *Nakia* does not address why an Indian like Little Eagle is so keen to save a Spanish mission. Making her case to the city council, Diane argues, "Our mission is even older than the Alamo. It was a mission 250 years ago, then a settlers' fort, a church, a Pony Express station, and finally Bailey's stagecoach stop. It's a microcosm of American history." An Indian could certainly get behind such an effort to preserve heritage, but it is surprising Diane elides the colonial function and symbolism of this structure. Or *not*. Perhaps it just seemed logical that Indians would align themselves on the side of tradition, as Manly Wade Wellman's Tsihah character Bear Tree comes across as more genuinely Indian than his nephew Joseph Arrow for opposing an improved reservation highway in "The Indian Sign" (1948).

The only "Indian" we meet who favors the development is trading post proprietor Indiana Johnny. Johnny reveals himself as either a "lapsed" Indian like Joseph Arrow or an Indian only in wardrobe when he thrusts his forefinger at Nakia and counsels, "Hey, Nakia, you better ask that Great Spirit of yours how you can get in on a piece of the action, man." His name (Indiana, not Indian, according to the trading post sign, though the movie's credits identify the character as Indian Johnny) and that "Great Spirit of yours" construction lend support to either theory. So does that gesture: many Indians find pointing at someone rude.

After Nakia busts some young men hired by Chambers' local agent and lawyer McMasters to incite a riot at the preservationists' headquarters, Indiana Johnny becomes more insistent in directing Nakia:

INDIANA JOHNNY. You could be a very important man around here, Nakia. Yeah, if the McMasters plan goes through, you could be Sheriff if you wanted to. What do you think of that?

NAKIA. Where did you hear all this?

INDIANA JOHNNY. Oh, well, somebody could make it happen, if you could just let things take their natural course and not interfere so much.

NAKIA. [Staring coldly] Like tonight?

INDIANA JOHNNY. Like tonight. [Nakia leans toward Johnny, and Johnny retreats a step.] Hey now, Nakia, we're brothers. Give us a break, will you? I mean, it could change all our lives!

NAKIA. Into what, John?

As we also later learn about those hotheads creating the violent clash to discredit Little Eagle's group, Johnny is working for Chambers despite that appeal to tribal solidarity. Again, Indians could and sometimes have aligned themselves with such economic development plans, but *Nakia* makes sure that viewers read Indiana Johnny as a shady character and a sellout to powerful white interests.

Nakia's morality play fits the increasing ecological awareness of its historical moment: a handmade sign in Little Eagle's office window reads "PRESERVE instead of POLLUTE." It also echoes the counterculture versus establishment confrontation between the hippies of the "Freedom School" and law enforcement in the 1971 movie *Billy Jack* (which I discuss briefly

below), but with some important twists. In *Nakia*, Little Eagle's band of activists do not want to be left alone to do their own thing; rather, they are invested in the whole community's future. They also believe in legal recourse for creating that future, doing things like collecting signatures on a petition and testifying at hearings until they desperately resort to occupying the mission illegally to thwart Chambers' bulldozers. The Concord, New Mexico police are trying to act as neutral referees between the factions rather than tools of "the Man" as in *Billy Jack*. And, most notably, Nakia is a police officer, not a private citizen like Billy Jack—who defends the weak *against* police officers and other bullies.

In the pilot, however, Nakia grows increasingly frustrated and uncomfortable in his Deputy Sheriff role. A rather chaste imitation of a love triangle symbolizes the battle for Nakia's soul. The movie hints at a relationship with the white city attorney Samantha Lowell, though like Sam Buckhart, Nakia does not have much of a romantic life; indeed, several episodes from the series end with Nakia wistfully watching a potential partner walk out of his life, and the pilot only briefly shows Nakia and Samantha strolling together and chatting sociably. To Samantha, Nakia is wrong to bend the rules and release the cattle rustlers from jail: "You have flagrantly violated due process. They should have been tried in court." Nakia replies, "Sometimes, the law gets in the way of justice, wouldn't you say?" Later, because of the violence McMasters' hooligans instigate, the city council issues an injunction against the petition drive. Samantha assures Nakia that "It's a temporary injunction; [Diane] can show cause why it should be lifted," but Nakia points out that by the time Diane can complete that process, the city council will already have decided in favor of Chambers.

Counterbalancing Samantha's appeals to the letter of the law, Diane Little Eagle plays to Nakia's conscience. The movie indicates a long acquaintance between the two, and even

suggests some intimacy when Nakia consoles Diane the day after the attack on her headquarters. The camera pulls back from a closeup of a six-pointed star logo on the door of a police cruiser to reveal Nakia and Diane standing before the presumably doomed mission. As a flute and violin play softly in the background and the camera moves in to frame the couple closely, Nakia familiarly readjusts Diane's windblown hair. That a wooden bead gathers part of that long black hair into a strand and she is wearing a Navajo-style silver and turquoise pendant necklace underlines their common heritage, as do the brief Bear and Eagle parables they exchange to make sense of the legal fight over the mission's fate (fig. 8).



Fig. 8. *Nakia*. (April 17, 1974).

Contrary to Samantha, Diane accuses Nakia of following the rules too rigidly, of letting his station cloud his judgment. After Diane's five minutes to testify to the city council are up and the chairman angrily orders the police to remove her, Diane gauges Nakia's intentions:

DIANE. People respect you, Nakia. We need your help.

NAKIA. I'll help to see you press your argument . . . without illegal interference.

DIANE. Yeah, and you'll do the same for Chambers, too. You've changed, Nakia.

NAKIA. Life is change.

DIANE. When do you stop letting that badge cripple you?

Diane skewers Nakia in the heart of his uncertainty with this question.

Another "Sam" seconds Samantha's ideas about what that badge ought to represent. When Nakia remarks that he is not sure he will enforce the injunction that has stymied Diane's effort to collect petition signatures, Sheriff Sam Jericho reminds Nakia of a lawman's duties: "I told you it wasn't an easy job. . . . Well, this is one of the hard times. When you put on that badge . . ." But Nakia interrupts, "It's not a badge anymore, Sam. It's a pair of handcuffs around my wrists."

The riot at Diane's headquarters turns Nakia more sharply against the strictures of his official neutrality. Nakia has subdued one of Chambers' ruffians responsible for stoking the mob violence and is causing him great physical pain when Sam enters the headquarters and orders, "Let him go." Nakia replies, "I've got two counts of assault on him already tonight, Sheriff," but Sam counters, "That doesn't justify killing him." Nakia angrily releases his hold, marches out the front door, and cuts a straight line through the crowd. Samantha hurries up to him and asks, "Nakia, what happened? Nakia!" But Nakia strides silently past her.

Nakia's crisis comes to a head when the city council votes in favor of Chambers because Diane's group lacks a sufficient number of local signatures on their petitions. He leaves the council chamber holding hands with Diane and exhorts her group to struggle on: "Let's not take this council decision as a defeat. We must continue this fight; there are many ways to win, many." Sheriff Jericho is alarmed by his deputy's display of partisanship and warns, "We wear badges, Nakia. We don't take sides." After a silent moment with their eyes locked, a shrill violin note sounds, and Nakia hands in his badge.

Nakia then journeys to the mountains and seeks guidance from his spiritual mentor Naiche. They sit around a fire in a dark room that looks like a kiva, though such underground spaces are particular to Pueblo cultures, not Navajo. Nakia laments:

When I was young, I swore I would not live my life on the reservation with its built-in boundaries. So, I left the reservation for what is out there, and now I have no boundaries, yet feel as closed in as if I were in prison. I don't know who I am, I don't know what I am. I almost killed a man in anger.

Nakia repeats his earlier complaint that his badge "became one of the ropes around my wrists," and adds, "I am at war with myself, Naiche," but the wise elder counsels, "There are times we feel we are bound, but the rope is in the mind. . . . The answer is within you, Nakia. Follow your own truth."

Nakia's truth eventually leads him back to the mission, where Sheriff Jericho faces an angry mob the police are barely holding at bay. McMasters has obtained a court order to oust the occupiers by force if necessary, and the crowd would gladly help with the extraction. Nakia offers to talk to Diane, and Sam, after a reflective pause, assents. Diane is set on making her stand there and then, but Nakia implores her to move her people out so that no one gets hurt.

Diane shakes her head and sadly concludes, “That means we’ve lost. By the time we can get an injunction, McMasters’ bulldozers will be knocking this mission down.” Nakia reassures Diane, revealing one of his deeply-held truths:

NAKIA. I won’t let that happen. I don’t want a single person being hurt. We’ve got a chance to do this thing the right way, without violence.

DIANE. Is there a right way?

NAKIA. Of course, there’s a right way. If we didn’t believe there was a right way, the Chambers of this world would always win.

Diane places her hand on Nakia’s heart and says, “I’m trusting you.”

We never get to see if Nakia can deliver on his promise. Just as Diane turns around and instructs her group to leave, a child screams “Fire!” and everyone begins evacuating the mission. Roused to action by the harrowing spectacle of Diane’s followers jumping from second story windows of the burning mission, the whole town joins hands to form bucket brigades and douse the flames until the fire department arrives to take over. Nakia captures one of McMasters’ fleeing thugs who have set the fire. Chambers, skittish about bad publicity, nixes the project; the next morning we see a procession of his bulldozers on flatbed trucks leaving town. Nakia reaches a balance point over how to serve the people. Regarding Nakia’s meeting with Naiche, Sam asks, “What kind of answers did you come up with?” Nakia explains, “Quit once. Don’t want to do that again. I hate to compromise. Guess I’ll just have to do it my way, each time.” And Sam tosses Nakia’s badge to him. Sam remarks, “Well, the old mission is saved,” but Nakia corrects him: “Not the mission, Sam. The town.” The two walk toward Sam’s police cruiser, where Samantha awaits, wrapped up in a police officer’s overcoat with a badge. Nakia and Samantha look into each other’s eyes, share a little smile, and then Nakia takes Samantha by

the arm and helps her into the car (fig. 9). As they drive from the mission, we see that Nakia has been brought back into the law enforcement family, but on his own terms.



Fig. 9. *Nakia*. (April 17, 1974).

The Nakia Parker of the television pilot ranges more freely between the poles of the Dialectic of Diversity than his more consistently assimilated predecessors Sam Buckhart and John Hawk. He shares their institutional location in law enforcement but is much more conflicted about wearing the badge. He meditates in the mountains and seeks wisdom from a tribal elder, not just from his white police elder. He displays survival skills like sucking water from a cactus and hunting with a sling after he is jumped by McMasters' ruffians and left in the desert. As Nakia runs in slow motion across the desert, Naiche in voiceover recites a supposed Navajo prayer, and Nakia repeats the end lines until fully taking over and completing the incantation:

Take power from the four seasons.

Take the four directions plus two.

From the Juggler, the Silent Twins, from the Spider Woman, Grandmother of all the
Earth,

Take the power and use it to heal.

But in this movie, Nakia's struggle over how to serve the people is not so much about how to be Navajo *and* a cop, a clash Hillerman would dramatize so effectively through Jim Chee. Rather, Nakia goes back and forth between working within or outside "the system," and ultimately reconciles the two. The movie suspends Nakia between his allegiances to Samantha and Diane, but Diane's cause (and, apparently, her army of idealistic volunteers) is not particularly Indian, and Nakia's decision is not so shaped by any Navajo worldview despite the fact that tribal elder Naiche delivers the advice to "follow your own truth."

Nakia's conflict between faith in government authority and following the dictates of conscience accords with the movie's historical moment of growing skepticism over Vietnam and a Watergate scandal escalating toward its climax with Nixon's resignation in August of 1974. The series aired that fall, however, downplays Nakia's qualms over his role as Deputy Sheriff compared to the pilot, at least in the nine of thirteen episodes I have been able to obtain on DVD. Like many television cops, Nakia still skirts the rules when he feels he must do so to deliver justice, but perhaps the series' creators decided that Nakia's existential dilemma over whether to work in law enforcement was not a sustainable dramatic element when a crime must be solved in one hour every episode. The Samantha Lowell character is gone, and no Indian appears to take up Diane's function as Navajo conscience for Nakia. Though he engages more with Navajo people and culture than Sam Buckhart did with Apaches, the series version of Nakia slides more

toward the “regulator” role Fitzgerald describes: ethnic minority characters who enforce the values of the dominant culture. The television series positions Nakia farther toward the assimilated end of the Dialectic of Diversity spectrum: invested in and with official authority, he is a true believer in the rule of American jurisprudence, albeit with much less pontificating about justice and the rule of law than Buckhart.

The episodes’ introductory scene tellingly removes the pilot’s prayer. *Nakia*’s theme music signals Native American with its insistent drumming and Hollywood soundtrack Indian motifs, as do the opening’s still images of a man in headband and buckskin, one dancer in an elaborately feathered regalia, and another in a Native ceremonial mask, interspersed with portraits of the show’s regular characters. The montage emphasizes place: all these images are tinted a sandy orange, the sequence begins and ends with a jagged stony mountain, and cacti and pueblos appear between these endpoints. The word “NAKIA” in bold block letters shines briefly against the first black butte, and as the camera zooms in we see beneath the white-hot sun a man silhouetted atop the rise. When he fills the screen, the background fades and a new one comes up behind him so that he is superimposed over twin monoliths (fig. 10):



Fig. 10. “Nakia - 1974 - No place to hide dead end kids - Robert Forster.avi.” *Youtube.com*, uploaded by seattle418, 17 Apr 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zI2dVwEdmeM>.

Nakia stands tall, almost a natural feature of his desert Southwest landscape.

Nakia sometimes stands alone, but he is no lone crusader for justice, like so many Western heroes riding off into the sunset once the bad guys are vanquished. For a single fellow, Nakia does more than his share of parenting and mentoring. Besides his nephew Half Cub, an analogue to Buckhart's Tess, Nakia counsels a spoiled rich white girl in "The Sand Trap" (October 5, 1974) *and* an immature rich white boy in "A Beginning in the Wilderness" (October 26, 1974). Like its television contemporary *Columbo*, several plots feature the wealthy and powerful receiving their comeuppance at the hands of a dogged working-class cop.

In "Pete" (December 21, 1974), by contrast, the flawed white parents are decidedly lower class. Nakia takes charge of a young boy left behind by his mother and stepfather as they hastily flee their home to avoid arrest. Sheriff Jericho had departed on a short vacation, leaving with the instructions, "I ought to be back before noon tomorrow. If anything big breaks before then, call me, and if you can't reach me, just go by the book. Don't pull an Indian on me, okay?" Nakia retorts, "Sam, it's a little tough for an Indian not to pull an Indian every now and then." This scene is played for laughs, but Nakia soon throws out the official playbook and takes Pete to stay on the reservation with Emma and her passel of young Indian boys, including Half Cub, instead of putting him in the county's juvenile detention center. He reasons to the dispatcher, "Irene, forget the book for a second, forget Jericho. Where would he be better off? Up at Emma's with all those kids around, or in jail?" The trope "pulling an Indian" here signifies the familiar cop show theme of the strong-willed police officer refusing to knuckle under to the rigid bureaucracy. The suspicious Pete is soon adapting enthusiastically to this new environment, as charmingly evidenced by Emma holding a bunch of empty buckets and crying out, "Hey children, who wants to go gathering some piñon nuts?" and all the boys, Pete included, cheering

and rushing to her side. Despite some tense moments when Pete's mother, who loves her son but is much less capable than someone like Emma of raising him, shows up on the reservation only to be captured and sent to jail, Pete accepts that he will be placed with a foster family and that his mother will be free in about five years. Nakia's unorthodox approach to Pete's predicament proves effective. Sam sternly sets about revising the official rules, apparently to put a stop to Nakia's rogue behavior. Taking dictation, Irene prompts Sam, "recommending the following changes in procedure. First . . ." And Sam surprises her with, "Uh . . . First: hire more Indians." Both characters laugh as the credits roll. About the Indians we meet in this episode, it is not clear what Nakia's relationship is to Emma, even though Half Cub is in her charge and calls Nakia "Uncle," or to the resident keeper of Navajo tradition, Ben Redearth. Still, "Pete" shows Nakia engaging with other Indians, which Sam Buckhart only does in his pursuit of Charley Wolf, and John Hawk (in the episodes I have seen) never does.

Ben Redearth also figures prominently in "The Dream" (November 23, 1974), an episode that does more to contrast Indian and non-Indian ways of knowing than the others I have watched. "The Dream" guest starred none other than the actor who portrayed Sam Buckhart, Michael Ansara. Ansara played Doctor Howard Grayhawk, who is distraught over a dream Redearth has about Grayhawk's demise. A Concord City College student Grayhawk had assigned to undergo "psychiatric treatments" in junior high school for assaulting a female classmate learns of the dream's details from a Navajo classmate, lying to her, "Paulette, listen, uh, listen, I'm doing this, uh . . . thesis on Indian folklore. You know, dreams, um, prophesies, all that kind of thing. How is he going to die?" Two of the four predictions in Redearth's vision duly come to pass, making Grayhawk more and more anxious. Sheriff Jericho asks him, "Now you're a scientist, a doctor, and yet you still believe in visionary dreams?" And Grayhawk

replies, “I’m still an Indian, Sam. I always will be.” After the third sign (a “box that talks”—a television in Grayhawk’s living room—causes a fright by shorting out), Nakia has Grayhawk detained on artificial charges so he cannot make his foreordained rendezvous with a demon “on the first day of the full moon . . . on the sacred mountain,” according to Paulette. Dressed like the doctor, Nakia goes in his place and foils the trap set by the vengeful student and his buddy.

Riding in Nakia’s truck to the reservation, Sam tries to get Nakia to discount the dream by appealing to their role as police officers (fig. 11):

SAM. Nakia, when you first joined the department, that was what, about three years ago?

NAKIA. Yeah, about that.

SAM. The first day you were issued certain items. There was a uniform, which you wear whenever the spirit moves you.

NAKIA. Well, I’m getting better on that, Sam.

SAM. There was a badge, which you immediately replaced.

NAKIA. And that was my grandfather’s idea [Nakia’s badge with turquoise at the center is prominently visible]

SAM. Oh yeah, I see. And there was a gun. Do you have any idea what I’m getting at?

NAKIA. Yeah, I guess I do, Sam.



Fig. 11. *Nakia* “The Dream.” (November 23, 1974).

But *Nakia* leaves open multiple interpretations. The murderous student had fallen to his death as *Nakia* chased him, so lawmen cannot confirm whether he engineered all the events that Redearth predicted, and *Nakia* tells Sam that the young man’s partner in crime is not sure if his deceased friend staged any of the signs besides the last one. The episode closes with Half Cub asking, “Uncle, I don’t understand. Did the Anglo make the dream happen, or did Redearth really see the future?” *Nakia* replies, “Well, that’s a pretty good question, Nephew,” and after a thoughtful pause, asks his own question: “I wonder if it matters? I wonder if it matters?”

The other eight episodes I have viewed stay away from the supernatural or the uncanny. “No Place to Hide” (October 19, 1974) is much more representative of the series. This story does plenty with the New Mexico setting but not so much with *Nakia*’s Navajo identity. “No

Place to Hide” offers some of the teasing and good-natured banter over the protagonist’s Indian heritage we have witnessed in *Hawk*. Sam Jericho explains the real background of Concord, New Mexico’s newest resident—Archie McIntosh was formerly New York mob accountant Archie Middleton, newly released after serving two years in prison—and asks Nakia, “Things starting to come together?” Nakia nods and replies, “Yes, sir,” and Sam continues, “Anyway, when [mob boss] Big Pete died, his kid Norman took over. Norman realized that Archie had the brain of a computer, so he put him in charge of ‘investments.’” Nakia clarifies, “Laundered money,” Sam remarks with a little smirk, “For a reservation Indian, you’re doing pretty good,” and Nakia looks down and grins. But Sam and Nakia soon argue over Sam’s plan to “roust” Archie out of town before the mob sends another hitman after him, even though Archie has served his time, done nothing wrong, and has the right to stay. Sam calls Nakia “stubborn” for standing on principles and not letting the mob dictate to them, and Nakia responds, “Yeah, like a reservation Indian.” And that’s about it for references to Nakia’s Navajo upbringing until the end of the episode, when Archie agrees to enter the Witness Protection Program and testify against the mob. Sam asks Archie if he has chosen a new name, and Archie points a thumb at Nakia and says, “You know, I kind of like his name, Parker. No, I really mean it. It sounds so Anglo-Saxon.” And everyone shares a chuckle.

If “No Place to Hide” makes only perfunctory nods toward Nakia’s Navajo heritage, it develops much more extensively the perennial country mouse/city mouse or fish out of water theme as city slicker Archie tries to start fresh in New Mexico. We first meet the repentant mobster when Nakia and Half Cub on horseback find him stranded in the desert with his disabled vehicle. Nakia discovers that the u-joint is broken so the car will need to be towed and offers to ride two miles to the nearest house and make a phone call. Against the empty landscape

backdrop, Archie asks, “Is there a restaurant around here that I could sit down and have a bite while I’m waiting?” Archie, however, is eager to learn about his adopted environs, comes to embrace new experiences like eating sopapillas at the local café, and even marries a widowed single mother from Concord (plots move quickly in the limited time frame of a weekly television series episode).

Though many viewers would also find Nakia’s world a touch exotic, they would be utterly at home in his conventional cop show format. Nakia fits the bill as one of the “regulators” Fitzgerald cites, with a bit more attention paid to Indian culture than in *Law of the Plainsman* or *Hawk*, as well as more conflict between Indian identity and law enforcement career, but still lined up with values most American viewers would recognize as their own. As Archie and his bride and stepson drive off toward first the grand jury in New York and then life somewhere under an alias, Sam wonders, “Do you think they have a chance?” Nakia opines, “If there’s any justice . . . and I think there is.” Like *Hawk*, *Nakia* lasted just half a season (the pilot and 13 episodes) in 1974, but the short-lived show indicated the direction forward for popular culture indigenous sleuths: desert Southwest terrain instead of *Hawk*’s urban beat, and contemporary times rather than *Law of the Plainsman*’s Old West. *Nakia*, though not a ratings success, shares its template with the print *Mysteries* of the same era that would finally help the Native American detective character develop a larger following.

Go West, Young Indian Detective

Despite flashes like Sam Buckhart, John Hawk, and Nakia Parker, the Indian sleuth would finally find sustained success in the novel rather than on the screen. The Western marshal, not noir tough guy John Hawk or gentlemen private eyes Phil Scott and Eagels,

provided the model for those first detectives in the upcoming wave. Their “beat” is not “the canyons of New York after dark,” though they would share *Hawk*’s contemporary time frame rather than an historical setting like *Law of the Plainsman* or *Navajo Joe*. Joe Leaphorn, Sam Watchman, and Johnny Ortiz operate in the wide-open spaces of the desert Southwest. Once Tony Hillerman, Brian Garfield, and Richard Martin Stern staked a claim with these three Western lawmen, and the subgenre started yielding gold with significant sales, the familiar demand for content produced variation beyond the sheriff home on the range, though few of those newer Indian detectives patrol city streets. Like Leaphorn, Watchman, and Ortiz, most of the scores of Native American sleuths to emerge since the early 1970s solve crimes in rural settings. These novels bring Indian characters into the present, unlike the backward-looking Western, but they mostly project these detectives against the backdrop of “Indian country,” not the urban environment. As the Western did for generations of readers and viewers, most Indian detective novels dramatize the frontier, or at least what might seem like its modern equivalent to many white readers. The popular Indian detective novels still entertain by making Native Americans mostly denizens of the what those white readers likely consider the wilderness (which probably just seems like home to many Indians *and* non-Indians).

Sam Buckhart, John Hawk, and Nakia Parker contribute something else useful to their 1970s paperback progeny: a way to reconcile tensions between attacking and preserving “The Establishment,” a pejorative term to revolutionaries and reformers of the 60s, but, with suitable translation into “American values” or “civil society,” an ideal considered threatened by many coming out of that incendiary decade. Amplifying the examples of these three television Indian detectives, who surely needed to be more careful about getting “political” than their print descendants, Hillerman, Garfield, and Stern’s protagonists critique white bureaucracy,

exploitation, insensitivity, and oppressions of many sorts, appealing to more liberal sensibilities, yet also uphold mainstream law enforcement values dear to conservatives. Fitzgerald suggests Cedric C. Clark's 1969 term "Regulator" for such media figures as Sam Buckhart and John Hawk:

Subaltern characters (i.e., members of subordinate groups or "second-class citizens") become enforcers of the dominant group's norms. Though Clark was mostly concerned with African American representations, I found his framework extremely predictive when applied to Native American characters: his "Regulator" is closely related to the tropes of Pocahontas, who purportedly "finked" on her father, as well as Friday, a Carib (or an Arawak) who served as Crusoe's "Indian companion." (xv, italics in original)

Thus, Fitzgerald follows Ward Churchill's understanding of characters like Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn, heir to Deputy Marshal Sam Buckhart, as colonial collaborators: "There are more than ample antecedents for Hillerman's characterizations of American Indians in 'Gunga Din' and others of Rudyard Kipling's literary apologetics for British colonialism in East India" (83). Fitzgerald and Churchill rightly point out the Indian detective's function as enforcer for the dominant culture; in apprehending villains but *not* questioning the Western criminal code that designates those villains, these detectives send the assimilationist message that the system serves justice, and that evil is done by bad individuals and not bad institutions.

Today "niche" programs find a following through myriad cable and internet channels, but neither *Law of the Plainsman*, *Hawk*, nor *Nakia* garnered high enough ratings to survive past one season in the concentrated Darwinian competition of network television; *Hawk* and *Nakia* were even replaced mid-season. I am impressed Buckhart, Hawk, and Nakia even broke into the network lineups, and we should consider what gave producers and writers the confidence to pitch

these series, and how their programs attempted to satisfy viewers. They certainly were not bucking any trends as far as the dominant genres of their moments, so the “hook” was their Indian protagonists. The producers and writers hoped introducing Indian heroes into these familiar Western and Cop Show formulae would prove “interesting” (i.e. unfamiliar and exotic). Even a highly assimilated “Regulator” like John Hawk proclaims some special Indian identity to entice consumers, Sam Buckhart proudly wears that headband and tantalizes viewers with nuggets of insider “Apache” wisdom when he’s not quoting Latin, and Nakia Parker rides the range with a nephew named Half Cub.

Though Fitzgerald does not give the exotic appeals enough attention, he explains well the assimilationist component of the Dialectic of Diversity in these fictions: the three Indian detectives mostly operate just like the other TV marshals and cops, upholding rather than challenging dominant narratives of justice. Yet even here his analysis could be extended beyond its focus on the detective figure to a fuller consideration of the venue for Buckhart’s, Hawk’s, and Nakia’s adventures. Fitzgerald draws on the rich discussion over media representation and stereotypes, but despite some consideration of market forces and collusion between privately-owned media and the state, does not say enough about the network television series format and how it predetermines the range of communications.

Fitzgerald’s analysis could benefit from perspectives like Marshal McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” and Stuart Hall’s approach to interpreting that medium in his influential 1973 essay “Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse.” Hall cautions against “low-flying behaviourism” frameworks that characterize a television message as “a tap on the kneecap” (131) of viewers, but insists “we must recognize that the discursive form of the message has a privileged position in the communicative exchange (from the viewpoint of

circulation), and that the moments of 'encoding' and 'decoding', though only 'relatively autonomous' in relation to the communicative process as a whole, are *determinate* moments” (129, italics in original). Much as I have been arguing about the Mystery genre constraining the meanings that will resonate or even register with readers, Hall explains how the coding into and decoding out of television discourse stacks the deck toward certain interpretations:

we say 'dominant' because there exists a pattern of 'preferred readings'; and these both have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalized. The domains of 'preferred meanings' have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of 'how things work for all practical purposes in this culture', the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions. (134)

Fictions like *Law of the Plainsman*, *Hawk*, and *Nakia* as mysteries already serve the genre's problem → solution imperative and necessarily encourage debates about justice; that they meet consumers through the television medium concentrates that demand for closure and introduces a level of meta-messages absent from a paperback detective novel, aspects like corporate sponsorships and commercials, scheduling and surrounding programming, and soundtracks. Even the actors and the associations they evoke from audiences add to the complexity.

Fitzgerald offers sharp insights on how the television medium has represented Indians through sound and image, but he does not adequately consider how the commercial network series served as a platform for advertising, or, especially, how the constraints of episodic television, before the miniseries starting in the 1970s and the more recent cable series with their long narrative arcs, required plot closure in just a half hour or an hour *every week*. Problems

solved with such predictability and regularity within the boundaries of the individual episode, as well as marketing conducted in its interstices, contribute to the work of representing Indians just as do the more noticeable images, dialogue, and soundtracks that Fitzgerald examines. Series like *Law of the Plainsman*, *Hawk*, or *Nakia* may supply viewers a sense of control and containment of Native Americans like what the reservation system itself has long provided for the larger populace: this Indian protagonist will, courtesy of the sponsors, keep a weekly appointment in the American living room, solve a case, and depart promptly on schedule, and with minimal protest.

How the Western Was Lost

In *any* medium, detectives made up a tiny portion of popular culture Indian characters before Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee gained a fan base and imitators started tripping over each other in the search for bodies throughout Indian Country. Most Americans would encounter fictional Indians almost exclusively through the familiar Western while that genre continued to captivate the public, and knowingly encounter representations of real Indians hardly at all. Only when interest in the Western began to flag and Indians brought their Civil Rights struggles more prominently into the public eye, developments related to each other and a whole host of reappraisals during the 60s, did the reading public grow more receptive to Indian characters *not* in a straightforward Western but in Mysteries set in the West, and with a good portion of the Western's DNA: desperadoes, dusty trails, open space, shoot-outs, etc. Native American investigators still have not made much of an impact on television or movie screens, but dozens of Indian detectives have appeared on bookstore shelves since 1970. What made this type of character marketable at that particular historical moment after it had only fleetingly engaged the public imagination over the previous 90 years?

The culture's consensus over how the West was "won" began to fray, ironically enough, even before the 1962 release of the movie *How the West Was Won*, but myth-dismantling efforts tore apart the tapestry of Manifest Destiny with more and more energy as the decade progressed. The counter-culture challenged much that was sacred to the respectable middle and ruling classes, so the Western lost force as a myth creator and maintainer. Hollywood, ever attuned to or at least aiming for the youth market, began turning out "anti-Westerns" that portrayed the past in a cynical rather than romantic light. *Little Big Man* (1970) conveys the shift in national mood toward the past (and, by proxy, the current Vietnam conflict). There Custer is a belligerent buffoon, and the title character is played by Dustin Hoffman, an iconic figure of youthful disaffection with the worldview of older generations thanks to his role in *The Graduate*.

Young people's reappraisal of the America created for them sometimes led to solidarity across gender, racial, and class lines in support of social justice causes. David Fuller Cook's novel *Reservation Nation* (2007), set in the Vietnam era, notes this awakening political interest from the somewhat bemused perspective of an Indian resident when outsiders show up at an AIM rally on a fictional reservation: "There were a bunch of young white people there too, hippies and whatnot, back-to-the-landers, counterculture this and counterculture that, young people looking for something. They were drawn to the reservation" (52). Along with greater political engagement in Native American causes, this curiosity also engendered appreciation for and fetishization of Native American cultures. In Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* (1993), Victor recalls a famous photograph of his father "dressed in bell-bottoms and flowered shirt, his hair in braids, with red peace symbols splashed across his face like war paint" and about to attack a National Guardsman, and remarks that his dad was "the perfect hippie, since all the hippies were trying to be Indians" (24). The Hippies performed, with

their long hair, drug use, and communal living arrangements, a fantasy conception of Indianness: ahistorical, nonspecific, and celebrating the pacifistic while ignoring the martial. But along with this identification with romanticized Indians, non-Indians' genuine interest in living Indians rather than just the Indians of long ago also swelled around the same time. Schools formed Native American Studies departments, the University of Minnesota's Department of American Indian Studies being the first in 1969; N. Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize the same year for *House Made of Dawn*; and the first Earth Day in 1970 signaled changing attitudes toward "Nature," a concept tied intimately to Native Americans in many minds. A confluence of currents brought contemporary Indians into the non-Indian national consciousness and conscience, and made the old vehicles for non-Indian storytelling about Indians increasingly obsolete. That is not to suggest that their growing presence in the American conversation simply happened *to* Indians in the 60s and 70s; as on other fronts in the Civil Rights movements, Indian activists *made* their presence known.

The Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War struggles vacillated between nonviolence and militancy. That photo Victor describes in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* conveys just such mixed signals with red peace signs, red for Indian, no doubt, but also the color of blood, adorning Victor's father's cheeks "like war paint"; a newspaper runs the picture with the caption "ONE WARRIOR AGAINST WAR" (24). Attempts from that era to tell stories about Indians wrestled with these same conflicting responses to injustice. The movie *Billy Jack* (made in 1969, released in 1971) has the title character internalizing the debate: the half Indian/half white Billy Jack is an ex-Green Beret who comes to detest violence but cannot escape its necessity (in his mind) as he defends peaceful hippie students of the "Freedom School" from conservative rednecks in cowboy hats. The movie claims counter-culture peace

and harmony through the students who just want to be left alone to “do their own thing,” but also offers the spectacle of Billy Jack kicking butt with his martial arts moves.

It is a cultural leap from cheering for the cowboy hats in *How the West Was Won* to cheering for Billy Jack standing up to oppressors in cowboy hats just nine years later. The detectives that launch the modern wave of Indian mysteries, however, were not counter-culture figures like Billy Jack. Joe Leaphorn, Sam Watchman, and Johnny Ortiz are officially sanctioned law enforcement agents, closer to Billy Jack’s antagonists in station than to that rebel with a cause. There might still have been discomfort in much of the reading public with Indian violence on whites, even righteous violence à la *Billy Jack*. And with crumbling support for militarism and the rise of Feminism, machismo like Billy Jack’s, even in the service of the vulnerable, would grow less appealing to more and more readers. That Hillerman hits a balance between traditionally manly competence and toughness on the one hand, and self-deprecation and doubt on the other with his Navajo policemen Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee—more David Return than Super Jim Anthony—contributes much to their success over their more hard-boiled contemporaries Watchman and Ortiz.

Chapter Four

Desert Swarm: Hillerman, Garfield, Stern, and Their 1970s Southwest Sleuths

Despite occasional sightings over the ninety years prior, the Native American detective did not achieve any lasting purchase on the American imagination until the 1970s, and I am curious why. Last chapter, I discussed how tensions in 1960s and 70s American culture opened space for this proliferation of Indian detective characters. As the Western lost force as a vehicle for making the Indian legible for non-Indians, the Mystery genre moved to the forefront of the fiction marketplace to carry on that cultural work, provoking a major but mostly unremarked shift: the Indian, routinely cast as the impediment to justice, now serves as the instrument of justice.

In this chapter, I will consider the first literary Indian detectives poised to take advantage of these changed cultural sensibilities. All three initial protagonists are professional lawmen, and it is gratifying for many readers to see an Indian character succeeding in a career *and* integrated into an institution, especially law enforcement, after the civil rights protests and counter-culture rejection of “the establishment” that reached a crescendo around these very years. Despite these novels’ frequent criticisms of the mistreatment of Native Americans, the message is that a resourceful individual sometimes will surmount such barriers. But these comparable characters produced quite different sales, accolades, and popular esteem. Of the three similar Indian detective series introduced at the start of the 1970s, only one, Tony Hillerman’s, would go on to represent (and, for many people, wholly encompass) the subgenre. Hillerman’s resourceful, successful, and institutionally authorized police officer (and later, officers) resonated with readers better than the other Native investigators launched at the same historical moment.

With more finesse than his contemporaries Brian Garfield and Richard Martin Stern, Hillerman satisfies readers' impulses toward assimilation and exoticism, especially after the younger Jim Chee character joins Joe Leaphorn. Hillerman's characters also model tribal and institutional communalism, which apparently appeals to readers more than the relative isolation of Stern's Johnny Ortiz and especially Garfield's Sam Watchman. And finally, Johnny Ortiz and Sam Watchman's machismo must not have connected so well with social currents in the 1970s as did Joe Leaphorn's masculinity: capable, rugged, and forthright, but also without the certainty inside and the outward swagger. All three characters bear traits of the Western hero, but readers can more likely identify with Hillerman's Leaphorn and, later, Chee than with the fearsome lawmen that Garfield and Stern offered. The public was finally primed to accept a Native American protagonist in a position of authority, but that did not mean it would respond favorably to a scary Indian with a badge.

Patrolman Prototypes and Precursors

Phil Scott, the Indian Detective (1882) is a reasonable candidate for first literary Native American detective, but there is room for debate. Brian Hauser calls James Fenimore Cooper's much earlier "pathfinder" character Natty Bumppo if not a detective than a "precursor" to the modern detective (127), and though Bumppo is born of white parents, he is raised by Indians and navigates the geographical and metaphorical boundaries between peoples. Wherever we choose to place that marker for first Indian detective protagonist, it is a small field of candidates before the 1970s. But the fictional indigenous detective ranks begin to swell in the 1970s, and the frontiersman Natty Bumppo provided a model for these Indian country sleuths.

Natty Bumppo also counts multitudes of Hollywood wranglers and cowpunchers among his progeny. With the dramatic demise of the movie Western, despite occasional revivals and revisions like the 2010 remake of *True Grit* and 2012's *Django Unchained* (neither particularly concerned with Indians), there are far fewer mass media images of Indians in circulation than during that Hollywood genre's decades of dominance until the early 1960s. Likewise, the television Western, which contributed thirty network series at its zenith in 1959 (Nowalk), became a rare breed after the 60s. Sales figures for Western novels probably mirror this decline in public interest, though the genre has tried to adapt to shifting tastes. All *twenty* of Amazon.com's "Bestsellers in Frontier & Pioneer Western Fiction" category (May 5, 2015) are actually Western Romances, some in series like "Dalton Brides," "Prairie Hearts," and "Mail Order Bride Western Historical Romance," most with long-tressed white women and dashing white cowboys on the cover, and all listing female authors. That is not to suggest that a real Western must be written by a man, but that the spotlight has shifted from conquering Indian territory to conquering male hearts, from "civilizing" the wilderness to civilizing one handsome rogue. A niche brand of romance replaces those dashing cover art cowboys with shirtless Indian braves embracing gasping white women; titles like Dolores Drake's *Crave: A Forbidden Romance* (2017) and Karen Kay's *Night Thunder's Bride* (2017) invite a complementary study of Indian representation and the Dialectic of Diversity. The Romance percentage drops in Amazon's "Western" category of bestsellers (7 out of 20 titles), yet not a single Western novel cracks Amazon's general 100 bestsellers list. In aggregate, the Western or Western-Romance hybrid no longer serves up the volume of Indian images to the mass audiences it once did.

The desire to make the Indian legible persists, nonetheless, and Indian Detective fiction seems to have risen partly in an effort to fill that need. Three non-Native writers almost

simultaneously introduced Indian Detective Novel series in the early 1970s. Hillerman launched Navajo Tribal Police detective Joe Leaphorn's durable literary career in *The Blessing Way* (1970). In *Murder in the Walls* (1971), Richard Martin Stern gave us Apache/Latino/Anglo detective Johnny Ortiz of the "Santo Cristo" Police Department. And in 1972, Navajo State Trooper Sam Watchman made his debut in Brian Garfield's *Relentless*. The close proximity of these birth dates, the shared Desert Southwest landscapes, and the overlapping cultural backgrounds (at least in the minds of many readers who may not make fine distinctions between Indian groups) of these protagonists are remarkable—or predictable, given the competitiveness of the paperback Mystery trade.

It is not, however, remarkable that the Indian detective novel emerges into the public embrace on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement, an era of increasing fascination with minority protagonists. For example, black Philadelphia detective Virgil Tibbs, dignified in his suit and tie, reluctantly partners with a rural, Southern white sheriff in the film version of *In the Heat of the Night* (1967). African-American cop John Shaft, clad in black leather and strutting the urban streets, commands an altogether different kind of respect in 1971's film *Shaft*. Tibbs and Shaft incline toward opposite ends of a spectrum from Virgil Tibbs's assimilationist appeal (despite the tensions, we really can work together) to John Shaft's defiantly anti-assimilationist appeal ("they say this cat Shaft is a bad mother—shut your mouth," as the lyrics to the Isaac Hayes theme song put it). Despite their different formulations of the Dialectic of Diversity, both characters sprung from the imaginations of white men, the novelists John Ball and Ernest Tidyman, like all the Indian detectives we have encountered so far. (Martin Cruz Smith, of Native American and Spanish heritage, would offer Indian detectives in the novels *Nightwing* in 1977 and *Stallion Gate* in 1986; women writers, indigenous or otherwise, would not work in the

Indian detective subgenre until the 1990s.) Both movies were commercial successes, but it makes sense that *In the Heat of the Night*, with its more assimilated black detective, garnered establishment recognition—it won the Best Picture Oscar—while *Shaft* and its exotic protagonist achieved a cult (and counterculture) following.

Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft are urban sleuths, though Tibbs is the proverbial fish out of water in *In the Heat of the Night*, while the three Indian detectives appearing on the literary scene in the early 70s patrol the desert Southwest, trading on a fascination with rural life that arises whenever modernity—coded as *not rural*—seems overwhelming; urban Indian investigators reminiscent of Alexander Knox’s London-based Egels and New York investigator John Hawk would only reappear in later decades. The three “founding fathers” of the recent Indian detective boom also inhabit similar locations on a spectrum of assimilation versus exoticism, unlike the contrasting Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft. Even though Joe Leaphorn, Sam Watchman, and Johnny Ortiz are close to Virgil Tibbs in their assimilationist appeal, the conversation about similarity and difference is still vital to their novels. Nearly as much as their exciting plots, the way these novels dramatize the Dialectic of Diversity energizes these tales.

Though Hillerman and his two white contemporaries Garfield and Stern were working a surprisingly old literary vein, their Indian detectives must have appeared fresh to readers. Still, these protagonists offered familiar attractions. Along with an image of Indianness that conveyed an exotic appeal for most readers, these characters embody some of the same qualities that have drawn readers to literary detectives as well as other heroes for decades: ruggedness, an intimate knowledge of the terrain, and an independent spirit. That independence affirms mainstream America’s tendency to celebrate the individual over the group and partakes more of the Western and Hard-Boiled literary traditions than more familiar patterns for writing the Indian, such as the

elegiac “Vanishing Indian” or the undifferentiated savage hoards descending upon virtuous settlers, two different ways to erase individuals. Hillerman’s detectives, however, display individual competence as they operate within tribal and law enforcement communities, and thus have broader appeal than Garfield’s and Stern’s protagonists, lone crusaders for justice who ride off into the sunset like the cowboys of screen lore. For example, Stern’s Johnny Ortiz encounters a large cast of continuing characters, denizens of a fictional “Santo Cristo” modeled on Santa Fe, and he operates within a small police department, yet Ortiz often reflects on himself as an outsider because of his Apache, Anglo, and Hispanic heritage, bonding over a sensibility shared with his girlfriend Cassie Enright, one of the few African Americans in Santo Cristo. And Ortiz has no contact with other Indians despite being raised by an Apache mother on a reservation. In Garfield’s *Relentless*, State Trooper Sam Watchman avenges the murder of an acquaintance, an older Indian bank guard, suggesting tribal solidarity. The novel, however, showcases the efforts of one brave man over the ineffective army of law enforcement encircling the snowbound mountains hiding the criminal gang. Watchman gets help from a young white partner and interference from an overbearing FBI agent, but the narrative foregrounds his “relentless” pursuit of the perpetrators as a personal quest. Neither Johnny Ortiz nor Sam Watchman provides the sense of living Native American communities that Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee offer readers.

The Western has long celebrated male protagonists who stand apart from the communities they protect—as someone inevitably asks at the conclusion of *The Lone Ranger*, “Who was that masked man?” That dynamic of inside versus outside is often foregrounded by Indian heroes. For instance, *Billy Jack* can resonate both with both viewers’ vigilante and communal impulses by portraying a strong individual who is both part and apart from the

community he shields. Likewise, these 1970s Indian detective novels present strong individuals serving communal justice, but with a range of engagement in their communities from Sam Watchman's isolation, through Johnny Ortiz's slowly growing sense of affiliation, to Joe Leaphorn's and later Jim Chee's belonging within tribal and tribal law enforcement communities. These characters all partake of the Western hero riding alone *and* the cop working through and against law enforcement bureaucracies, sending mixed signals about assimilation and its relation to individualism.

American *and* Indian Males

Assimilation in this Native American context does not only mean fuller integration within largely non-Indian institutions or tribal police forces modeled after law enforcement agencies outside the reservation; assimilation into mainstream American culture, as sloppy a concept as "mainstream American culture" is, also means greater emphasis on the individual than in the Native cultures these figures represent. The novel form excels in portraying and promoting just this sort of individualism. These particular Indian detective novels accommodate a striking polyvalence of meanings along these two entwined axes: exoticism versus assimilation and communalism versus individualism. The axes do not align neatly pole to pole but rather oscillate. A character can project an exotic appeal by standing apart from his or her community *or* by standing with a group deemed exotic by writers and readers. On the other hand, a character can project an assimilationist appeal by standing out as a strong individual in the American hero mode *or* by fitting in with the larger society. So these novels conduct complicated dances with the Dialectic of Diversity and with individual versus group dynamics.

Their discourses on masculinity add to that complexity. As police officers, Joe Leaphorn, Johnny Ortiz, and Sam Watchman are establishment figures, but their Indianness confers upon them a countercultural cachet. Both sources of identity can enhance their masculinity in readers' eyes. The policeman as enforcer of the rules, protector of the vulnerable, and punisher of the wicked conveys strong paternal connotations. And a Native American male testing his survival skills in the wilderness scores high on the manliness scale for many readers. Robert Dale Parker notes that prior to the emergence of certain influential Indian women writers and the "reinvention of reading set off by feminist critics" (both also starting around this early 70s era), the canonization of only a few Native American novels "made it possible for readers to see the preoccupation with uneasy masculinity in such novels as John Joseph Mathews's *Sundown* (1934), D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936), or N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) as simply natural, the way things are" in Native American Literature. Indeed, Parker adds, because of the theme's ubiquity in this small sample, "it was possible *not* to see the preoccupation with uneasy masculinity at all" (ix, italics in original). It is doubtful that Hillerman, Garfield, or Stern was in conscious dialogue with these texts, though they probably knew of Momaday's contemporary Pulitzer Prize winner. All three, however, provide alternative versions of masculinity with their Indian protagonists. Against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights struggles, and all the concomitant debates over masculinity, their confident crime-solvers offer reassuring models of Indian manhood; there is nothing "uneasy" about the masculinities of Johnny Ortiz and Sam Watchman. That Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn leavens the manliness with a dose of self-doubt gives his novels an edge in the 1970s marketplace.

As we saw in Chapter 3, these early 1970s Indian detective novels also neatly reconcile tensions between attacking and preserving “the Establishment,” a pejorative term to revolutionaries and reformers of the 60s, but, with suitable translation into “American values” or “civil society,” an ideal considered threatened by many in that incendiary era. Hillerman, Garfield, and Stern’s novels critique white bureaucracy, exploitation, insensitivity, and oppressions of many sorts, yet also uphold mainstream law enforcement values. As we also saw in Chapter 3, Michael Ray Fitzgerald, discussing Indian cops on television, suggests Cedric C. Clark’s 1969 term “Regulator” for such media figures as Sam Buckhart of *Law of the Plainsman*, John Hawk, and Nakia Parker, “enforcers of the dominant group’s norms” (xv), and these print Indian detectives also warrant that label. Here again, however, Hillerman broadens his novels’ appeal beyond his competitors’ by eventually developing a dialogue between Western criminal justice and his portrayal of the Navajo concept “hozho” (also spelled “hozro”), an ideal of balance, order, and harmony. Of course, the restoration of *hozho* still means putting away the bad guys and not directly challenging American colonialism. Jane S. Bakerman argues that those bad guys can stand for the system and their demise be an indictment of it. She cites the example of the wealthy and powerful Benjamin Vines of Hillerman’s *People of Darkness* (1980). The evil Vines is not a government official, but Bakerman claims his takedown by Jim Chee represents a rebuke to the system (256). I wonder if many readers share Bakerman’s allegorical reading of Chee fighting “The Man.” Hillerman’s fiction *can* accommodate readers interpreting characters like Vines as emblems of systematic injustice, but they are probably more likely to view Vines and his counterparts as flawed individuals.

Bakerman inadvertently suggests part of the Hillerman duo’s appeal when she notes approvingly that

Leaphorn and Chee are practical men who recognize reality and who then strive to operate effectively in it. Their realistic pragmatism is also clearly revealed in their attitudes toward situations which have developed from the government's manipulation of lands and people. Chee, for instance, assigned to discover who is vandalizing a windmill located on land recently and arbitrarily transferred from Navajo to Hopi control, doesn't evaluate the justice or injustice of the transfer; he recognizes the parameters used by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and proceeds with his job. (257)

Jim Chee may grouse about the difficulties of police work among the hodgepodge of boundaries on the "checkerboard" of Indian country, but he does not concern himself so much with the histories that produced this map. His duties as a "Regulator" are too pressing.

The narratives also cannot risk getting bogged down with land title taxonomies, which may be especially complicated in Chee's vast neighborhood. There are tribal trust lands, held by the federal government in trust for tribes; allotted trust lands, held by the federal government for individual Indians; fee lands, which may be owned by Indians or non-Indians; and non-tribal land exclusively controlled by federal and state governments as well as local governments *other* than the tribal governments themselves ("Definition of 'Indian Country'"). This "trust" concept rankles many Indians and non-Indians alike, even more so since the federal mismanagement (or simply theft) of Indian incomes from trust lands came to light for the general public with settlement of the Cobell v. Salazar class action suit in 2009. Given this long history of federal duplicity, Chee's pragmatic acceptance of official BIA "parameters" bolsters Ward Churchill's contention that Leaphorn and Chee present a "sympathetic portrait . . . of the most traitorous elements resident to North America's Indian Country" (83).

While Fitzgerald and Churchill play up these detectives' assimilationist appeal for mostly non-Indian readers, they unfairly downplay the characters' exotic appeal. Many readers apparently are drawn to characters different from themselves in culture and locale but wrapped in the Mystery genre's familiar formulae. Fitzgerald's most assimilated "Regulator," John Hawk, still tries to convey some special Indian essence under that dark suit and tie, and characters like Ortiz, Watchman, and especially Leaphorn tantalize readers with much more insider knowledge about purportedly exotic cultures.

Just as I suggest Fitzgerald give more consideration to these television Indians' exotic appeal for most viewers, I also argued in the previous chapter that he could further explore the influence of their medium on the messages their programs convey, and the same imperative applies to this chapter's "novel" indigenous sleuths. In appraising the sources of Hillerman's popularity, Churchill does invoke genre if not the novel's form or the print medium itself; he discusses the Mystery genre's treatment of class, violence, and the status quo under the heading "The Ideological Function of Detective Fiction" (72). But he does not address the way that genre satisfies readers' simultaneous needs to reinforce *and* erase difference. By the very mechanism of their mystery plots, which guide readers' discovery of concealed order within apparent chaos, these novels excite with the unknown and also validate an empirical, scientific worldview. Fitzgerald and Churchill minimize a crucial appeal of the Mystery formula applied to Indian protagonists—satisfying the exoticizing impulse of the Dialectic of Diversity as well as the assimilationist one—that helped these Native American detective novels break through to commercial success.

Tracking Johnny Ortiz

Two of the first “ripples” in the more recent wave of Indian detectives, Johnny Ortiz and Sam Watchman, trade on the reputation of the Indian as the ultimate tracker. Each debut novel’s presentation of its protagonist’s tracking abilities amounts to a mini forum on essentialism—what characteristics, if any, are foundational to an ethnic identity—and illustrates the Dialectic of Diversity in action.

In *Murder in the Walls* (1971), Stern’s Ortiz is “part-Apache, part-Spanish-American homicide cop,” according to the back cover, though other characters consider him Indian throughout the novel, and he reflects almost exclusively on his Apache heritage. When his informal partner in the investigation (and developing love interest) Cassie Enright figures that he lives up to the Indian tracker reputation, Johnny is forthright in his self-assessment:

“I suppose,” Cassie said, “that you are one of those legendary trackers who—”

“I’m not as good as some,” Johnny said, “but I’m better than any you’ve ever seen.” (28-9)

Johnny’s self-assessment likely strikes readers as refreshingly honest and without undue modesty, but he does not normally toot his own horn in this manner and risk coming across as conceited. The omniscient, third-person narration makes it easy for the narrative to build a detective’s stature, without turning off readers with the protagonist’s boasting, by refracting his or her image through other characters’ perceptions. For instance, a venerable character whose expertise we are led to trust, “old Ben Hart,” seconds Johnny’s proclamation. The validation is sincere, not socially coerced, since Ben is alone with his thoughts: “After extensive search, he found what he assumed to be the tracks Johnny had mentioned, but they were fragmentary and to Ben, himself no stranger to the art of tracking, wholly meaningless. ‘That goddam Indian,’ he

said to the empty mesa. There was more than a touch of admiration in the phrase” (113). Later, a fellow police officer furthers this Indian mystique and attests to the hero’s dogged persistence as Johnny traces footprints in the wreckage of a house until “gradually a picture emerged” of the man’s actions and demeanor:

Pacheco knew all about Johnny Ortiz and his Apache tracking ability. Track a shadow through hell, they said, and catch up with its substance on the other side. Now, looking at Johnny’s face, his eyes, Pacheco was prepared to believe it, at least the part about going through hell without pausing as long as what he was after was still ahead of him. (218-9)

In this character’s eyes, as well as many other people’s estimations, apparently (“they said”), Johnny appears nearly supernatural in his sign-reading skills and persistence in the hunt. The phrase “Apache tracking ability” lends his aptitude an aura of inherited wisdom off-limits to the non-Indian.

The narrator reinforces the affinity between the detective and the tracker or scout; Johnny seeks connections between puzzling clues, “his eyes squinting as if studying faint tracks” (223). But Johnny tends to equate tracking with science rather than Native wizardry. He guides the anthropologist Cassie Enright through a crime scene’s evidence:

“Now come over here and look.” He led her ten or twelve feet back toward the center area. “There. A heel print, part of one. There’s another. There are two more partials—different—this second fellow walked forward on his toes. That’s Montoya—right height, right weight, right walk. His footprints stop where that [blood] stain is. The others go on, but where there’s dirt to see, the heel marks are deeper.” He looked at Cassie then. “What would that suggest to you?” He paused. “You use the same kind of deductive reasoning in your work, don’t you?” (31)

Johnny's gesture of respect toward Cassie's intellect and profession sets the stage for their growing personal relationship, although a Native American writer probably would not have created an Indian character so uncritically accepting of—even uninterested in—the work of a non-Indian anthropologist at Native sites.

Though Johnny thinks of his own tracking as “deductive reasoning,” he is, of course, aware of the Indian tracker reputation, as well as aware that it gets mythologized into a racial stereotype, but he nonetheless understands his work as extending beyond science—at least beyond the caricature of science as unimaginative that we receive in a scene where Johnny hopes the white Saul Pentland of the state police lab can be “drawn out of his scientific shell” and engage in “a little guesswork”:

[Saul] said now, “I’m no mystical medicine man, son. Facts are all I know, and I’ve given you the facts.”

“All right,” Johnny said, “now start interpreting them.” With ageless patience bred into his bones, he sat on the corner of Saul’s desk and waited. (162)

One gathers that the patience is bred into the Apache portion of his bones rather than the Spanish-American. This text, like many other Indian detective novels, walks both sides of the street when it comes to essentialism. Sometimes, as in the examples of the police officer Pacheco and Ben Hart, non-Indians project essentialist qualities onto Indians. Sometimes an Indian detective will make an essentialist claim of his or her own and attribute some skill or character trait to Indianness, though Stern usually seems careful to avoid such pronouncements, and the fictional Indian detectives in Stern’s novels and elsewhere often play these self-assessments for laughs, invoking stereotypes tongue-in-cheek to show themselves culturally savvy and good-humored.

In this last example of the encounter with Saul, a disembodied narrator offers the essentialist claim unfiltered by any character. But it is easy to miss how this tightly packed signifier creates the aura of essentialism yet leaves some wiggle room for a more social constructivist view of how an Indian might become an excellent tracker, or anything else. “Ageless patience bred into his bones” certainly connotes the transhistorical (“ageless”) and racial (“bones”) qualities of many essentialisms. At first glance, “bred” also suggests inheritance, but it can mean training as well, as in the phrase “born and bred”: if bred *only* meant genetics, the phrase would be redundant, just as “good breeding” indicates both circumstances of birth and upbringing. The text leaves open the possibility that any stereotypical Indian aptitude such as tracking or patience must be nurtured by good teachers and much practice.

Johnny is happy to use Indian stereotypes to his advantage, however; in an installment of the series published much later, *Missing Man* (1990), Johnny puts considerable pressure on a suspect, Charlotte Upfield. She charges that following her “was part of your campaign of terror. I am beginning to believe now all those tales they tell of you *savages*.” This is one of many instances where the cruel Apache guise suits Johnny: “Johnny nodded equably. ‘Good.’ He turned his head to look straight at her. ‘Because most of them are true,’ he said” (183, italics in original). Throughout the series, Johnnie’s friends say or think that they would hate to have Johnny on their trail. For example, the “Dr. Watson” character, Sergeant Tony Lopez, once again mystified by the workings of Johnny’s brain, recalls a typical exchange:

The *brujo*, witch, was seeing things in smoke again, he thought, and that brought to mind a tale he had once heard about old Mark Hawley and Johnny.

“What beats me,” the congressman had said, according to the tale, “is how we Anglos managed to go to the mat with your people and come out on top.”

“Simple,” Johnny had said. “You stole our sheep.”

Maybe the Anglos had been able to do it, Tony thought now, but he personally wanted no kind of confrontation with Johnny—ever.” (*Interloper* 44-5)

Such little asides bolster our estimation of Johnny—here the repetition of “tale” giving him a legendary aura—though this “fierce Apache” theme, even as it satisfies the exoticizing impulse of the Dialectic of Diversity and puts Johnny in the male-not-to-be-messed-with category of masculinity, probably does not endear the character to readers in the way that Hillerman’s capable but decidedly not fierce detectives invite empathy. Readers understand that Johnny’s aggressive scare tactics imply a morally-sanctioned purpose: in the *Missing Man* case, the purpose of solving the murders of Charlotte’s husband and later that of a known arsonist. And those tactics work. In the language of the hunting metaphor that runs through the novel, Ben Hart proclaims, “you’ve sure as hell flushed somebody out of the brush, boy” (142), and Johnny pins the murders on Charlotte and discovers her accomplice, the titular “Missing Man.”

But Stern’s Johnny Ortiz tales, like countless other novels offering an Indian detective to a largely non-Indian audience, do more than give us readers a sleuth with uncanny tracking or other talents derived from a stereotype. They humanize Johnny by giving him a sense of humor about Native stereotypes; many readers like their fictional Indians savvy about Indian representations and somewhat self-deprecating, to temper that confidence. At the state police lab, Saul reaches his guesswork limit and admits bewilderment at how Johnny will proceed from a scanty clue on a corpse’s shoes: “‘White Gypsum,’ Saul said. ‘There’s gypsum in a lot of places, but White Sands is the biggest area I know, and what you think you can make out of that I won’t even try to guess.’” Johnny immediately undercuts this intimation that he has special Indian powers with a playful parody: “Johnny grinned at him. ‘What I do,’ he said, ‘is light a

fire and send smoke signals to the Great Spirit. Usually he replies by Western Union” (*Murder in the Walls* 163).

Johnny’s sense of humor can run dry when he confronts prejudice. In a challenge to white “ownership” of science, Johnny faults the white legal establishment for the limited reach of its science as well as its racially biased weighing of testimony, and engages in a little essentializing of his own:

“those tracks aren’t evidence that would stand up in court. Joe Hernandez would agree with me, and Billy Longwalk, they’re both Apache, and maybe one, two others, but no court would listen to them either, and they know it, so they wouldn’t even bother to testify if they were asked. White man can go screw himself; he believes only what he wants to believe.”

The African-American Cassie Enright commiserates: “We call him Whitey” (*Murder in the Walls* 171). Johnny and Cassie’s relationship draws on their mutual feelings of outsider status. This anti-assimilation note gives the series a racial edge that might discomfort some readers and attract others. Hillerman’s fiction, on the other hand, provides countless white villains but tends not so forcefully to bring the goodwill of white people *in general* into question.

While readers likely understand Johnny’s use of the savage stereotype as an instrumental decision to achieve justice, the novels carefully dispel any suggestion that he is actually a man of uncontrolled violence *because of his Apache nature*—we are led to credit only his tenacity on the hunt to that racial/cultural heritage. That drive and those tracking skills, we are told again and again, set Johnny apart from the other characters in Santo Christo, and not just in the way that many detectives are drawn as eccentric; Johnny is different because of his Apache background, which repeatedly blots out his Latino and Anglo heritage in his reflections. The novel attributes

his emphasis on the Apache strand of his heritage to not having known his father and being raised by his Apache mother on a reservation, but Johnny's sense of himself *as* Apache does not include current contact with other Apaches.

Johnny's remarks and reflections about living as an Apache in a largely non-Indian world give him psychological depth, but his role as lawman is paramount. His badge is a visible, reassuring sign that Johnny subscribes to the dominant society's understanding of "Law and Order," whatever misgivings he may express about "Anglo" culture. Johnny directs any anger he feels about injustice down acceptable channels; he reserves violence for the lawbreakers the text designates.

In both *Murder in the Walls* and *Missing Man*, nearly bookends to the series, as *Missing Man* is the penultimate novel of seven and released the same year (1990) as the finale, those villains are guilty of greed and real estate swindles. Such tales could be parables about land conquest by Anglo-Americans, Spaniards, or warring indigenous peoples, but Johnny short-circuits that possibility in *Murder in the Walls*. He reflects on why he does not fit the "local mold" in the fictional Santo Cristo:

Johnny did not buy the theory, for example, that the Anglos had robbed the Spanish blind in the matter of land-grabbing after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. As he saw it, the Spanish only held the land in the first place through conquest, and now that by fair means or foul some of it had been taken from them, they were claiming that their rights had been violated. As far as that went, someone had told Johnny and he had verified, the original land grants for both Virginia and Maryland extended to the "western sea"; which meant that the Spanish Crown and the British Crown had given to their respective subjects title

to the same land, which belonged to neither of them. And yet the matter of land rights was a subject bubbling with furious emotion. (57)

And yet here Johnny leaves the topic. He shows readers that he is aware of territorial controversies but does not pursue them to ends that might discomfort anyone. In these two novels, bad Anglo individuals do bad things (the two male villains are quite similar), and Johnny exposes them. He and Cassie join the fight to preserve a Spanish colonial house from the bulldozer of developers, but he is not so interested in revisiting or making amends for historical wrongs.

Though Johnny keeps Santo Cristo safe from threats homegrown or imported, in the first novel he considers himself an outsider like Cassie, though his Spanish roots in this region may stretch back centuries and his Apache roots further. Stern brings more nuance to this portrait of racial outsiders when he has Cassie reminisce to Johnny about her awkward childhood: “‘I was a fat little girl,’ Cassie said. ‘I looked around me, and I thought, ‘Dear God, I’m going to grow up fat and ugly—and neither black nor white. Why can’t I die right now and get it over with?’” (*Murder in the Walls* 139, italics in original). Cassie’s intelligence and beauty also make her feel different: “Cassie. Cassandra Enright, Ph.D., anthropologist, was slim and lovely, with even, friendly features and café-au-lait skin. ‘I’m a black chick,’ she had said once, ‘with a go-go dancer’s carcass and a head stuffed to the eyeballs with anthropological erudition, and where do I find a man to go with all that?’” (*Interloper* 12). Johnny Ortiz eagerly volunteers to be that man. Though Cassie’s alienation does not come solely from her race, both characters repeatedly lament their status as racial outsiders in Santo Cristo. It does seem that some white writers never tire of creating these ethnic minority characters uncomfortable with their race, and some white readers never tire of hearing about their plights. Not to diminish such difficulties literary

characters and real people face, but I wonder who is served by the repetition of these outsider or “caught between two cultures” narratives, read enthusiastically by a lot of people who do not experience these pressures directly. At least these minority characters like Johnny and Cassie, created by a white man’s imagination, provide white readers the opportunity to feel empathy across racial lines, but I wonder why characters with conflicted racial identities apparently intrigue them so much. Perhaps writers and readers cannot resist the built-in drama of the Dialectic of Diversity that the fictional Johnnies and Cassies supposedly negotiate.

As the series progresses, Johnny moves into a stable relationship with Cassie and feels more connected to the townspeople. But from the beginning he always *functions* like an insider by working through the institution of law enforcement to solve crimes whose solutions leave the status quo intact. Cassie and Johnny are not *wrong* to feel marked by racial difference, but they don’t do anything about it besides cling more closely to each other. These novels make readers feel good that they are enlightened about racial prejudice, but we are never made to feel complicit in racial injustice. Just as readers may feel comfortable with both the exotic Indian tracker and the assimilated police officer, they feel comfortable with these narratives—the mysteries and their solutions may satisfy in part *because* they do not challenge non-Indian readers. These novels have a touch of protest about them, enough to make readers consider social justice, but Stern’s books do not espouse programs for social justice. They do not make it their job to improve the world, though it would be nice to hear how Johnny’s being raised by a single Apache mother on a reservation might shape his ideas on a just world beyond the occasional angry comment about “white man.”

No One Is a Better Indian than Sam Watchman

Johnny complains that the “white man” as jurist would be unimpressed by the Indian-tracker-as-detective when he explains to Cassie how courts would discount the evidence he gleans from the crime scene (*Murder in the Walls* 171). But a publisher must have thought white readers would find the figure compelling, for another prototype for Native American detectives, Garfield’s Sam Watchman, spends nearly his entire debut novel tracking and chasing down criminals through the wilderness. Even more than police lieutenant Johnny Ortiz, this Indian character presents an instantly recognizable law enforcement type—his broad-brimmed State Trooper cap dominates the novel’s cover. Garfield’s *Relentless* (1972) features a Navajo lawman, but unlike Stern and Hillerman’s novels, it is not a Mystery; Chapter Two reveals the perpetrators. Rather, the cover promises “a novel of breathtaking adventure.” The third-person narration alternates between Watchman and a procession of criminals in a gang fleeing after a bank heist; as each criminal is eliminated or apprehended, the criminals’ side of the chase story jumps, somewhat awkwardly, to third-person narration about another member of the gang, keeping readers from accessing the head villain’s mind until the final few pages and thus preserving his status as an almost superhuman nemesis. Despite inhabiting a novel with a narrative structure that emphasizes the “cat and mouse” game and the thrill of the chase rather than uncovering a murderer’s identity, Garfield’s Watchman, like Johnny Ortiz, is a forerunner of the many Indian detectives who have appeared in more conventional whodunits.

Sam Watchman, like Johnny Ortiz, has a vaunted reputation as a tracker, and he delivers the goods. His surname marks him as a protector but also underlines his observant nature. The novel quickly contrasts Watchman’s skill with the lesser abilities of his white colleagues: “From boyhood his eyes had been trained to read signs left in the earth’s surface. You learned these

things quickly when you grew up hunting stray sheep across the broken badlands of the Window Rock country. For Buck Stevens and the Nevada trooper it wasn't all that easy—the tire markings were a jumble of intertwining grooves, disorderly and blurred and often superimposed—but Stevens did say, ‘Is that a motorbike track?’” (31-2). Watchman’s reflection that his ability is learned rather than innate and his acknowledgment that the rookie Buck Stevens is beginning to learn it temper the essentialism of the Indian tracker.

Watchman uses his expertise to retain control of the search when the arrogant FBI agent Vickers seeks to assert authority by confidently but incorrectly interpreting tracks.

“It’s a cute theory,” Watchman said. “There’s only one hole in it.”

Vickers’ smile coagulated. “Such as?”

“The way I read the signs, four or five men walked away from this plane.

Probably five.” (93)

For Watchman, his tracking expertise is a point of Indian pride. That pride is tested when Keith Walker, who defects from the criminal gang to save his own neck and the kidnapped Marianne Lansford’s, gives Watchman a warning about his opponents, former Green Beret Vietnam veterans:

“The Major and Baraclough. You want to look out. You’re Indian, aren’t you?”

What did that have to do with anything? “Yes.”

“Then maybe you know a little something about snares and traps and ambushes.

But I’ll tell you this—Hargit maybe knows more than you do. And Baraclough. Maybe they’re better Indians than you are. You want to look out.” (172)

Vickers, however, will have none of such essentialist nonsense: “Next you’re going to tell me that [Watchman] can smell a white man in a blizzard.” Watchman short-circuits this

conversation with parody reminiscent of Johnny Ortiz's: "I also grunt and wear feathers and consider myself a member of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Now if we're through with the ethnic discussions let's get these horses saddled" (173).

When Watchman captures Steven Baraclough but Major Leo Hargit is still on the loose, Baraclough echoes this notion that the white man Hargit's skills surpass the Indian tracker's: "Nobody ever took us apart before. But he'll be back for us. He knows how good you are now and he'll take you next time. He's a better Indian than you are." And the narrator recalls for readers the earlier exchange: "It reminded Watchman of something Keith Walker had said. *A better Indian than you are*" (208, italics in original).

With the alternating third-person narration, we witness Watchman grow in stature in Hargit's eyes—even as Hargit does not know the identity of his pursuers. When a booby-trap grenade fails to take the wily trooper out, Hargit's loyal sergeant Eddie Burt remarks, "they ain't bad for country cops," and Hargit replies, "they're not bad, Sergeant, but they're no A-team. Their friends will be taking the three of them down off this mountain in canvas bags" (182-3). A while later when the posse eludes another carefully conceived trap, Burt gets frustrated: "Christ, the finish line keeps moving, don't it? These ain't no regular hick cops, not the way they keep one think ahead of us." Hargit will not cede the upper hand, but he does admit a mistake for the first and only time: "I underestimated them. I accept responsibility for that. But remember who we are, Sergeant. We're graduates of the finest guerilla training academy in the world. They've given us a little trouble because we didn't anticipate their intelligence—I take the blame fully for that—but just remember they don't have a chance" (199-200). Hargit's intense training, designed for jungle warfare in Southeast Asia, does not fully prepare him for Watchman's icy home turf, and he makes a fatal error because of the cold. The development of Hargit's grudging

respect for his adversary forms one of the novel's trajectories—he slowly realizes what Watchman has been all along. But the Watchman character is not static; he has his own arc of development involving a change in attitude toward his Indianness.

At the novel's outset, Watchman espouses a live-and-let-live philosophy when it comes to the white man:

The old man [his Father, an Agency cop] had had one thing nobody had ever taken away from him and that was his sense of humor; and that was Sam Watchman's legacy. No point in fighting the Indian wars all over again; the thing to do was get along with folks, have a few laughs, love a good woman and take pride in the dignity of your work. (20)

After the dour white police chief of San Miguel departs their company in a diner, Watchman playfully turns the tables with this observation to his junior partner Stevens:

"I'll tell you, son, comes the red revolution and there'll be some changes made. We're going to guide the white man in the proper enjoyment of life. We're going to educate his funny bone so he can rise up to our level of civilization from his unhappy savage state. And when that's done the Bureau of White Folks' Affairs will sign over full citizenship rights to the white man for as long as the sun shall rise and the rivers flow to the sea." (18)

But Watchman does not remain so flippant about race relations.

Watchman undergoes an awakening of Indian consciousness. Outnumbered and faced with a mountain blizzard, Watchman could leave the task of hunting down Hargit and his gang to the massive police dragnet. But he realizes that a survivalist of Hargit's caliber will likely elude this closing net, killing as he breaks through, and so Watchman decides to pursue the criminals

with his rookie partner Stevens and, to his chagrin, FBI agent and greenhorn Paul Vickers. When Stevens observes that Watchman is “making [the pursuit] into a crusade,” Watchman mentions the Navajo bank guard killed in the hold-up—“Jasper isn’t any less dead today than he was yesterday”—and reflects:

He hadn’t been raised to believe in eye-for-an-eye retribution; that was a white man’s concept. Indian law didn’t lean hard on revenge and punishment; it emphasized compensation of the victim instead. But you couldn’t compensate Jasper Simalie. The question had run through his mind at odd intervals in the past two days and although he had never developed much of an introspective habit he was beginning to realize what was behind this dedication of his that had come out of nowhere and taken him by surprise and stripped away a good many superficial layers of easygoing indifference. When you came right down to it, it didn’t seem to make a whole lot of sense: they had killed a Navajo. It was a streak of—what? nationalism? tribalism?—he had never thought he had in him. And there was another idea, too, hard to articulate: somehow he needed to demonstrate that they couldn’t be allowed to kill a Navajo brother and get away with it. (174-5)

Still, as he prepares to face Hargit in a final showdown, the slights to his Indian ability figure prominently in his thoughts:

In the end it was a foolish thing that boosted him onto the saddle of Buck Stevens’ horse and sent him up into the woods after Major Leo Hargit. It was the fact that two people had told him Hargit was a better Indian than he was. Nobody was a better Indian than Sam Watchman. He didn’t know why, but it was necessary to prove that. (212)

For Watchman, that means living up to the Indian reputation as the consummate woodsman.

Watchman's is a reductive sense of Indian as performed role. In his showdown with Hargit, however, Watchman most resembles a Western (white) marshal who "always gets his man." Watchman even has fun inverting cowboy and Indian roles when Stevens, surprised he has brought Baraclough in alive, comments on Watchman's clever maneuver: "Sam, you take some pretty dumb chances. I suppose you learned that trick of riding the offside of the horse from your old grandpappy Crazy Horse." And Watchman quips, "matter of fact I saw John Wayne do it in a movie once" (207). Buck Stevens, with that ultimate cowboy moniker, also enjoys the inversion game; throughout the novel he refers to Watchman as "kemo sabe," Tonto's fond name for the Lone Ranger. The rookie cop Stevens is playfully underlining the fact that he is a white sidekick to an Indian superior. In the novel's final words, the injured Stevens continues the running joke with a famous catchphrase from *The Lone Ranger* as Stevens is evacuated by helicopter.

He glanced back at Vickers and jerked his head conspiratorially and when

Watchman bent down close to hear his words Stevens said, "Say, who was that masked man anyway, *kemo sabe*?"

Watchman smiled a little. And then he said, "Don't call me that any more, Buck."

Stevens searched his face and after a while nodded with understanding. "All right, Sam." (223 italics in original)

What unarticulated understanding does Stevens see in Watchman's face? If Vickers, the "masked man" in Stevens's joke, represents the Lone Ranger, then Watchman's disassociation from the Lone Ranger icon makes sense—the entire second half of the novel undercuts Vickers

and his self-image as the square-jawed hero calling the shots and commanding respect. Plus, Watchman has just proven that he is the best Indian, so maybe that is why he puts a stop to Stevens's playful Indian/Caucasian role reversal. Both Watchman and Johnny Ortiz, however, break free of the "faithful sidekick" Tonto or subservient informer role that many an Indian scout has fulfilled in literature and popular culture. In these novels, the Indians are in charge.

We have come to expect banter such as Watchman and Stevens's running Lone-Ranger-and-Tonto joke from fictional cops. The easy racial humor in *Relentless*, though, must have seemed a little, well, racy in 1972. The novel draws attention to an Indian stereotype, albeit a stereotype with only positive connotations—unless we consider how the "close to nature" compliment can screen a condescending attitude. *Relentless* positions readers to admire Watchman's experience and intellect; we cheer Watchman as he lives up to the Indian tracker role better than his white adversaries and shows up the condescending tenderfoot Vickers. Not surprisingly, the novel does not encourage us to reflect on Garfield's performance in imagining a Navajo character's consciousness. Watchman's ethnicity provides a reasonable motive for his "relentless" pursuit of the killers, a plausible explanation for his knowledge of this particular landscape, and opportunities for humor and social commentary. The taunt that Baraclough is the better Indian adds zip to the "pissing-contest" plot and augments Watchman's exotic appeal. Like Johnny Ortiz as a representative of Apaches, however, the Sam Watchman character is not going to teach readers much about life as a Navajo.

Stern and Garfield succeeded commercially. *Goodreads.com* notes 44 Stern books, including the novel *The Tower*, purchased by Warner Brothers for about 400,000 1973 dollars and turned into the movie *The Towering Inferno* ("Richard Martin Stern"). The same website counts 77 works for Garfield, who also cashed in on film adaptations with the lucrative Charles

Bronson *Death Wish* franchise (“Brian Garfield”), and even a 1977 television movie version of *Relentless* starring Will Sampson. *Murder in the Walls* and *Relentless* showcase their appeal—the novels are both good reads with perhaps an unexpected depth of characterization and description for a mystery and an adventure novel, but that depth never gets in the way of efficient plotting. But their Native American detectives, though interesting to students of the Indian Mystery because of the patterns they establish, never caught hold of the public imagination like Hillerman’s Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee. The four are not that different, starting with the “regular guy” Anglo-sounding names Johnny, Sam, Joe, and Jim. Because these characters are so similar, one wonders why the American mainstream adopted Leaphorn and Chee instead of the others as their favorite Indian detectives—and likely their only recognizable Indian detectives, and also quite likely their favorite fictional Indians.

Hillerman’s Dialectic Duo

It is not clear (and perhaps not important) whether Hillerman (or Stern and Garfield) was casting about for subject matter for Mystery stories when he created Indian detectives or was intent on telling stories about Navajos and then chose the Mystery as an appropriate vehicle. Hillerman seems to indicate the former. On his official website, he explains that Joe Leaphorn was inspired by a young sheriff he met while working as a crime reporter in Texas who was “smart,” “honest,” and “wise and humane in his use of police powers”:

When I needed such a cop for what I intended to be a very minor character in *The Blessing Way*, this sheriff came to mind, I added on Navajo cultural and religious characteristics, and he became Leaphorn in fledgling form. Luckily for me and Leaphorn and all of us, the late Joan Kahn, then Mystery Editor of what was then

Harper & Row, required some substantial rewriting of that manuscript to bring it up to standards and I—having begun to see the possibilities of Leaphorn—gave him a much better role in the rewrite and made him more Navajo. (“Tony Hillerman” 1)

There is no hint of intended irony in this non-Indian writer making a character “more Navajo.” But regardless of Leaphorn’s genesis, the ensuing novels produced a much deeper and more serious engagement with Navajo culture than Garfield’s Sam Watchman books.

In one innovation that differentiates the Hillerman novels from the Ortiz and Watchman books, onwards from 1980’s *People of Darkness*, Hillerman’s fourth Navajo mystery, Hillerman creates a second Indian policemen protagonist, Jim Chee. Leaphorn is skeptical but not hostile toward traditional Navajo beliefs, while the younger Chee tries to reconcile working in the rational domain of law enforcement with training to practice as a *hataalii*, a Navajo singer and healer. Hillerman stages intriguing monologues within and dialogues between his characters with these two shifting foci of Leaphorn and Chee. As in Johnny Ortiz’s thoughts and conversations with his girlfriend, there is much introspection about “living in two worlds,” interior conversations that white people tend to assume dominate the consciousness of everyone else, and never seem to tire of reading. But Hillerman provides much more cultural commentary than Stern or Garfield per individual novel and, of course, in aggregate over his lengthy series, directed toward both Native and White ways. Leaphorn and Chee’s analytic bents toward cultures grow out of their educations. Bakerman notes how the series offers an extra justification for all this ethnography: “Both Leaphorn and Chee studied anthropology as undergraduates; both now study ‘the white man’ as symbol of an alien and puzzling culture” (257). Leaphorn and Chee must also navigate among the different Indian cultures of the Four Corners region.

Conversely, though Ortiz mentions those other Apache trackers, I cannot recall him ever crossing paths with another Indian in his daily rounds, and Watchman only has the briefest conversation with the doomed bank guard Jasper Simalie as *Relentless* sets the table for crime and apprehension. Watchman does encounter friction and distrust when he chases an Apache suspect on an Apache reservation in his second and final novel, *The Threepersons Hunt* (1974), but again the narrative features its chase plot over any deep reflections on differences and similarities between Navajos and Apaches.

Having two Navajo protagonists enables Hillerman to present Navajo sensibilities in greater complexity than having a single representative address other characters in dialogue or readers in thought. Hillerman can embody both the assimilationist and exoticizing impulses with his two lead characters, and in much more flexible and dynamic ways than Stern and Garfield with their solo detectives. Although Ortiz and Watchman are not stationary characters when it comes to negotiating Native versus Anglo culture, or what may seem like the exotic and assimilated paths in non-Indian readers' eyes, Hillerman's duo helps him explore the Dialectic of Diversity in ways that more likely satisfy the non-Indian public's need to make the Indian legible. He leverages drama out of multiple tensions: tensions between "traditional" and "modern" Navajo, frictions between Navajo and American legal codes and between various law enforcement agencies, competing communal and individual demands, and anxieties over what it means to be a man.

The "legendary Lieutenant Leaphorn," as he is referred to many times by many characters throughout the series, is renowned for his ratiocination. Leaphorn's map with countless color-coded pins most strikingly (and literally) illustrates his methods. His colleagues are at a loss over how this tool of Leaphorn's makes the underlying logic of a case legible:

“Did you ever wonder why I fool with those pins?”

“Yeah,” Chee said. He’d heard of Leaphorn’s pin-littered map ever since he’d joined the force. Captain Largo, his boss when he worked the Tuba City district, told him that Leaphorn used them to work out mathematical solutions to crimes that puzzled him. Largo couldn’t explain how that worked. Neither could Chee.

“I don’t know myself, exactly,” Leaphorn said. “I got into the habit years ago. It seems like sometimes it helps me think. It puts things in perspective.”

(*Sacred Clowns* 121)

Leaphorn’s need to “pin down” events on a map fits readers’ desire to make Indian country legible. I am not suggesting that poring over maps is an inherently non-Indian way of processing the world, even though historically so many have wielded maps to the detriment of Indians’ interests. Šárka Bubíková reads Leaphorn’s cartographical obsession as symbolic of his need to combine “western rationality with Navajo metaphysics to arrive at a solution to the mysteries” (145). Bubíková cites as evidence from *Coyote Waits* the narrator’s explanation that Leaphorn with his maps engages in an “endless hunt for patterns, sequences, order—something that would bring a semblance of Navajo hozho to the chaos of crime and violence” (150). That “semblance” connotes an outward appearance suggests the tension in Leaphorn’s hybrid method.

It seems unintentionally ironic that in this novel, *Sacred Clowns*, the object that symbolizes the fictional Tano Pueblo’s sovereignty is a cane presented to them by Abraham Lincoln, as Chee explains: “Those Tano people weren’t seeing an artifact for sale. They were seeing the cane as a symbol of the governor’s authority. They saw the koshare [the “Sacred Clowns”] accusing the governor of corruption, of selling them out on the toxic dump issue, I bet”

(337). For authorizing the mass hanging of 38 Indians in Mankato, Minnesota after the 1862 “Sioux Uprising,” as the settlers called it, Abraham Lincoln is not the admired figure in Native American circles that he is for most Americans. The cane itself, as a recognition of status bestowed by the central authority of the United States, is a powerful example of legibility. Objects created outside the culture have come to symbolize the highest authority within those cultures, marking hierarchies for both insiders and outsiders. Leaphorn, also created by a cultural outsider, will resolve uncertainties for outsiders and make legible the hidden patterns of those colored pushpins on his map of Indian country.

Jim Chee, on the other hand, though he is of course also an agent for revealing hidden order by solving mysteries, generally serves the exoticizing desires of many readers. In a side plot of this same novel, Chee faces a dilemma when the demands of official (White) justice collide with his understanding of the Navajo Way. Chee decides that justice is better served through the Navajo practice of reparation and healing than through the Tribal Police’s mandate to apprehend and punish. He does not arrest a drunk hit-and-run driver who is the sole guardian of a grandchild suffering from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and anonymously helps the man avoid “the law.” Chee involves his new love interest Janet Pete in his deliberations. Observant of traditional Navajo mores, Chee had been researching Clan lineages to make sure that Janet and he are an acceptable match. His gesture of Navajo justice toward the hit-and-run driver spurs this reaction from the culturally conflicted Janet:

“First, I want to tell you I decided I’m a Navajo. And I love you for how you handled that. And second I want to tell you I called my mother. And she told me that her clan, and my clan, is MacDougal, and we have this funny red and green and

black tartan, and the MacDougals are in no way linked to anybody named Chee.”

(324)

Chee’s anxiety over violating incest taboos is one of many markers of his respect for Navajo traditions. And here he has helped bring a mixed-heritage character into the Navajo fold. The novel has also taught non-Navajo readers a cultural practice they might find exotic and therefore intriguing. Garfield’s Watchman tales never give readers this sense of inhabiting a Navajo worldview.

Besides introducing two Indian detectives and thus making the Dialectic of Diversity unusually dynamic, and consistently foregrounding it throughout the series, Hillerman differentiates his tribal cops by age and experience, and then inverts our expectations of the range over which these two characters oscillate on a spectrum between assimilated mainstream and exoticized traditional. For Leaphorn, a tribal police force “elder,” is far more accommodating to a non-Indian worldview. Leaphorn is still acutely aware of cultural differences, and he does try to use those differences to his advantage. For instance, in *A Thief of Time* (1988), he attempts to exploit the white discomfort with silence to extract information from the public affairs director of a New York City art dealer: “Leaphorn had learned early in his career that this Navajo politeness often clashed with white abhorrence for conversational silences. Sometimes the resulting uneasiness caused *belagana* witnesses to blurt out more than they intended to say. . . . The silence stretched. It wasn’t going to work with this *belagana*. It didn’t” (184). We might expect the older generation to be more traditional and the younger to be more willing to embrace imported values, but in Hillerman’s duo, it is the older Leaphorn who sees himself as the realist, and he is dubious about the younger Chee’s goal to find an accord between the roles of police officer and traditional healer:

An odd young man, Chee. Smart, apparently. Alert. But slightly . . . slightly what? Bent? Not exactly. It wasn't just the business of trying to be a medicine man—a following utterly incongruous with police work. He was a romantic, Leaphorn decided. That was it. A man who followed dreams. . . . Chee seemed to think an island of 180,00 Navajos could live the old way in a white ocean. Perhaps 20,000 of them could, if they were happy on mutton, cactus, and piñon nuts. Not practical. Navajos had to compete in the real world. The Navajo Way didn't teach competition. Far from it. (*A Thief in Time* 226-7)

The novels maintain this creative tension by dividing our sympathies between these two protagonists, and by tracing their evolving thoughts on these questions of cultural authenticity. Readers, however, may not think to carry such debates beyond Leaphorn and Chee's literary world and consider the novels' authenticity in depicting Indian characters, especially because those novels come wrapped in covers displaying Southwest Indian images and graphic designs. Hillerman's complex characters are a vast improvement over the cardboard cutout Indians so prevalent in popular culture, but Leaphorn, Chee, and the Indians among whom they operate may be the only Navajos (or even Native Americans) many readers will meet, or realize that they meet. Hillerman's success has given him a great deal of sway over Indian representation. By all indications, it is a responsibility he took seriously, but now that we have had more fictional Indian detectives since the 1970s, it would be nice to see more diversity among those creating the representations. As we shall see in the next chapter, the great majority of writers vying to push their Indian detectives to the commercial heights of Leaphorn and Chee are, like Hillerman, outsiders to the cultures they depict. The proliferation of such characters makes sense after Hillerman's breakthrough, and we should applaud this new interest in Indian heroes. But we

might also hope for more Native American protagonists who are *not* detectives, since the terms of the genre limit the kinds of stories writers can tell about Indians.

An ancillary plot in Hillerman's *Coyote Waits* (1990) offers a choice metaphor for the entire mystery genre and suggests how a detective novel satisfies our need to be puzzled and our desire for a solution. It also illustrates how Hillerman constructs masculinities that appeal to a broader audience than the machismo of a Johnny Ortiz or Sam Watchman. Leaphorn and Northern Arizona Professor of American Studies Louisa Bourebonette are mystified by a series of photos they have recovered from murder victim Huan Ji's home darkroom. The photos, taken either by Ji or his teenaged son, all depict the same rock formation. They also find a photocopy of Jenifer Dineyahze's high school yearbook photo. Leaphorn suspects a connection between the photos and graffiti painted on some rocks that another murder victim, Navajo police officer Delbert Nez, had been investigating when he was killed. Leaphorn expects after visiting the site of Nez's murder and Jenifer Dineyahze's home that the rock formation in the photographs and the vandalized rock formation will turn out to be one and the same. When Bourebonette inquires why, he replies with a chuckle, "I was afraid you'd ask me that," he said. "I think it's because since my wife died I've started watching television. That's the way the plot ought to work out" (225). Hillerman pokes fun at television's obvious narrative machinery even as he is about to indulge, with sly wink, in plot machinations of his own. Leaphorn has also subtly reminded readers that he is a widower without the novel having to resort to intrusive narration.

From the vantage point of the scene of Nez's murder, the white paint markings on the black basalt are unintelligible yet intentional: Leaphorn "handed the binoculars to Professor Bourebonette. 'Notice the edges. Notice how carefully done.'" Leaphorn realizes where the photographer had been standing, and thinks "his uncle had been right. Things seem random only

because we see them from the wrong perspective.” On the ride to the young girl’s home, Leaphorn explains to Bourebonette that “it sounds crazy as hell . . . but I think either Ji or the boy took all those photographs and blew them up to plan where to put the paint” (227). Sure enough, when Leaphorn and Bourebonette arrive at the Dineyahzee home, they see the paint markings resolve themselves into the message “I LOVE JEN,” and the inscrutable motivation behind the bizarre paint pattern becomes the commonplace desire of a young man to catch a young woman’s attention.

Hillerman reminisces about the scene in terms of solving a plot difficulty. He recalls traveling around the desert Southwest with a photographer who encouraged him to look for images in rocks that would emerge with changed perspective: “Barney explain[ed] how viewer position and the optics of telescopic lenses affect what you see. It was the sort of data I usually find easy to forget, but I remembered it when stuck for a logical way to have a witness out in empty country witnessing a murder” (Hillerman “Tony Hillerman: Behind the Books”). But the way the white blotches on the rocks neatly click into place to become legible does more than expedite the plot of *Coyote Waits*; it provides a striking analogy for the way a mystery novel can satisfy both the exotic yin and assimilated yang of the Dialectic of Diversity.

Readers come to recognize the alien markings as evidence of puppy love, and Leaphorn’s thoughts add to the sweet, familiar emotions the graffiti invokes by helping them draw a parallel to the much later in life budding romance between the crusty Navajo cop and the white professor accompanying him. Before Leaphorn presents his theory about the rock-painting to Bourebonette, he “considered whether he would look stupid if he was wrong. It occurred to him that he was showing off. And enjoying it. He considered that. Why would he be showing off? Why enjoying this?” (228). Though self-aware enough at this age to ponder his reactions, the

once-more single Leaphorn reveals that he has something in common with the young lovesick graffiti artist. As a widower, Leaphorn already had readers' sympathies, and this "aw shucks" moment further endears him. Neither Johnny Ortiz nor Sam Watchman ever appears so vulnerable.

Hillerman's skill in handling the demands of the Dialectic of Diversity as well as balancing the individual and the communal and crafting an appealing masculinity did not emerge fully-developed on the page in the 1970s. Indeed, these passages I find most germane to my argument are twenty or more years into his series. They are a testament to his creativity but also his persistence; while Stern and Garfield wrote many novels besides their Ortiz and Watchman books, Hillerman focused almost exclusively on developing the Leaphorn and Chee mysteries. Hillerman's Indian detectives *do* contrast with their contemporaries early on, however, and he comes to dominate the subgenre with the first Indian detective characters to earn a loyal following over decades. The evocative presentation of Indian country, the taut storytelling, and the clever puzzles all contribute to that following. Hillerman also crafts fiction that appeals to readers across the political spectrum, from liberals and progressives who likely value the novels' multiculturalism and critiques of racism, rampant capitalism, and environmental degradation, to the conservative "Law and Order" types who likely most enjoy seeing social deviants punished. In addition to such attractions, the Navajo cops Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee and their ongoing personal and professional stories sustain readers' interest from one adventure to the next. And with these two characters, Hillerman dramatizes the Dialectic of Diversity in fine gradations, gives Indian and law enforcement communities a living complexity, and presents a compelling and non-threatening model of Indian masculinity.

Chapter Five

An Indian Country Crime Wave: Native American Detectives on the Trail

While television and movie producers have been slow to translate the Tony Hillerman novels' popularity into ratings or box office receipts, whether through adapting his mysteries or imitating them, other white writers have eagerly emulated Hillerman's heroes and Indian country milieu. Dozens of fictional Indian detectives now vie for readers' attention and, since Mystery writers actually get paid when a series hits big, their loyalty. I have explored how conditions around 1970 helped prime the reading public for Hillerman, Brian Garfield, and Richard Martin Stern's Mystery offerings that launched the Indian detective novel toward subgenre status, and I will now consider the environment in the late 1980s onward that favored the fiction niche's rapid growth. The Mystery's durable enticements alone cannot explain the sudden vogue for Indian detectives since such characters have come and gone for more than a century. Hillerman's bestsellers were a major mover, but a widespread and lively conversation about fair representation under the banners of "multiculturalism" and "diversity" surely facilitated their rise and may have led progressive-minded critics to go a little easy on Hillerman rather than grill his fictions like a hard-boiled detective interrogating a shifty suspect. The call for more diversity in literature could have made reviewers more skeptical about the non-Indian Hillerman, but they mostly avoided or hurried past tough questions about artists crossing cultural boundaries. The more thorough among them briefly considered such concerns and gave Hillerman credit for knowing his Indian material. Critics focused, reasonably enough, on the product rather than the producer. Commenting in 1982 as "Tony Hillerman" was becoming a recognizable brand in the genre, Jack W. Schneider observes the effects of multiculturalism on the Mystery field and singles out Hillerman's work for plaudits:

The plots, settings, heroes, and heroines reflect the changing social and political scene in America, with avatars of all shades of ethnicity and persuasions of sexuality now common to the pages of detective fiction. Perhaps the finest representatives of this new diversity within the genre, at least as regards the quality of the writing, the ingenuity of the plots, and the superb handling of background material, are the novels of Tony Hillerman. (151)

Such celebrations of Hillerman's skill and fidelity to his Indian subject matter are common, as are praise for the man's decency, but it is time to push past acknowledging Hillerman and his literary descendants for making Mystery fiction more diverse, and to assess their work in the context of the centuries-long project to make the Indian legible to non-Indians.

Just as the demise of the traditional Western and the powerful reassessments brought on by the Civil Rights movements prepared the culture coming out of the 1960s for Indian detective protagonists, the 1990s provided fertile ground for the unprecedented expansion of Indian Mystery titles. First, the detective novel is a proven crowd-pleaser, and marketing forces exerted a centrifugal push toward greater variety, much as I noted in the variety of dime novel protagonist types before the turn into the twentieth century. But in the 1990s, this desire for variety coupled with the rise of multiculturalism, a drive to bring more voices into the literary conversation. For many Mystery readers, an ingenious puzzle was no longer enough to hold their interest; they were drawn to learning about unfamiliar cultures. Such curiosity was not new, as Chad Uran's "Dialectic of Diversity" model attests. But in the 1990s acquiring knowledge about diverse cultures became a socially sanctioned activity, the responsibility of an informed citizen, so reading fictions about Navajo tribal policemen and other Indian detectives was not only an enjoyable pastime for non-Indians (as well as, no doubt, many Indians); it also

seemed to make them better people. As I have argued throughout this study, those non-Indian readers enjoyed encountering cultures they saw as alien but confronting them *within* the familiar context of the whodunit. People's interest in stories about characters from other cultures is healthy but does not necessarily lead to understanding or, even further, social activism. The problem in the case of Indian detective novels, mostly written and read by non-Indians, is that the cultural information is conveyed through the most problem-solving of our literary genres, giving the sense that issues facing Native Americans are getting fixed, whether or not the reality matches those assessments. These fictions also rarely take on systematic injustices toward Indians, offering mostly white villains, obviously "bad guys," with whom readers may feel no particular connection. The overall effect is that non-Indian readers feel congratulated for being enlightened without being compelled to do anything besides buy the next book in the series. Our appreciation for any consciousness-raising these Indian detective novels engender ought to be balanced by concern for the untold stories their popularity keeps out of our national conversations.

Grading Indian Authenticity

Diversity and Detective Fiction (1999), edited by Kathleen Gregory Klein, chronicles this multicultural movement in the broader detective genre. Contributors Gina Macdonald and Andrew Macdonald also wrote *Shaman or Sherlock: The Native American Detective* (2001), its supernatural versus rational title nicely encapsulating the "Dialectic of Diversity," the poles of exoticism and assimilation. In their shorter piece for Klein's anthology, the Macdonalds cover a range of "ethnic" detectives (and responsibly scrutinize the term "ethnic") but draw most of their

examples from Indian detective fictions. Macdonald and Macdonald justify that decision on the grounds that Indians are homegrown rather than imported:

In this discussion of the ethnic detective we will focus most heavily on the “most ethnic” of cultures in the American mainstream, that of the Native American. The continuing fascination with the American Indian, as demonstrated in the large number of mysteries with Indian sleuths, is revealing of the attempt to confront and understand the most exotic and legitimate Other Way practiced on the American landscape, a Way indigenous rather than transplanted from afar. (67)

Their use of “most exotic” to describe Native American cultures clashes with their point about those cultures’ domestic origins. It is also not entirely clear what the Macdonalds mean by “most legitimate”; perhaps Indian cultures’ birth on North American soil pushes them furthest up the legitimacy scale. And the capitalization of “Other Way” and “a Way indigenous” and the definite article before “Native American” seems (unintentionally, I’m sure) monolithic given their embrace of the multicultural. We should pay close attention to how Macdonald and Macdonald use this term “multicultural” to legitimate certain discourses about Native Americans and discount others.

For the Macdonalds, as for most commentators of the era, “multicultural” is not merely a descriptive term, but one of approbation. They line up five novelists to “illustrate the varying degrees to which such novels are ‘multicultural’” (70), ranging from C. O. Yarbrow’s Charlie Spotted Moon novels that are “not about Native American cultures at all” (71), through the “equally superficial” (71) Angela Biwabian tales by J. F. Trainor, to Jean Hager’s Mitch Bushyhead series, which makes “a more serious attempt at showing cultures at the crossroads,” yet “could . . . be moved to different settings and ethnic groups . . . with only minor changes”

(73), culminating in the sainted Hillerman's detective stories, "clearly the standard for Native American mysteries." Hillerman "has mastered the art of capturing the perspective and mentality of a relatively unassimilated group, in this case the Navajos, whose ways are clearly different from those of most readers and whose unique psychology affects the nature and solution of the crime" (74). Though Abigail Padgett's protagonist Bo Bradley is non-Indian, Padgett's novels are included in this spectrum of multiculturalism as "somewhere between Yarbrow and Hillerman" in their engagement with Native culture: "Despite their good writing and unique conception of the amateur detective, Padgett's novels are not truly multicultural: instead, they are somewhat like a tourist picking up souvenirs from a trip across cultures—a dazzling array of colors and styles but a touristic survey in nature rather than a Hillerman-like immersion in the practices of particular cultures" (77). Macdonald and Macdonald briefly mention the novelists' ethnicity, or more specifically, their lack of indigeneity (though they earlier list Jean Hager as "one-eighth Cherokee"): "The writers themselves are not Native Americans, but they have chosen to interpret Native-American culture for the audience" (77-8). But they do not follow up on any implications of this observation.

Despite their championing of more "real" representations of Indian lives, their concern shifts away from people and onto the integrity of the Mystery genre; they worry that too much shaman and not enough Sherlock produces a detective novel in which "the ethnicity works against the genre and the result is muddled and unsatisfactory" (78). Writers of ethnic mysteries may hit a sweet spot between the strange and familiar: "However, an understanding of another culture allows ethnic detectives insights into the psychology and sociology of those involved in their cases and engages the readers in the exciting experience of discovering a new point of view" (78). The assumption is that those readers don't share ethnicity with the protagonist,

which is no doubt most often the case, but not always; Indians read about their own and other Indian peoples. Especially for those readers who don't share the protagonist's culture, the ethnic detective must be made legible in order to be engaging ("ethnic" may be an improvement over the term "minority," but it does imply that ethnicity is a quality only certain people have). That's not an unreasonable demand of fiction consumed for entertainment, but it constricts the range of such "exciting" encounters with diversity. The takeaway is that multiculturalism is a good thing, but it must work in the context of the Mystery, which is *exactly* my problem with the way that so many of our popular culture's representations of Indians come through that filter.

"Multicultural" for Macdonald and Macdonald is really a code word for authentic, but they gauge that authenticity largely based on how well a writer makes cultural material serve genre expectations. Their most truly multicultural exemplar is the non-Indian Hillerman, who never lets his characters' ethnicity get in the way of an unmuddled and satisfactory mystery plot.

I enjoy the Mystery genre (in case you were wondering!), but sometimes when I confront yet another Indian story packaged as a detective novel I share the exasperation Roger Ebert expresses over the 1992 film *Shadow of the Wolf*:

The notion of making a movie about Eskimo life is a good one, but why did the filmmakers feel obligated to connect it to a lame and unconvincing story about a murder investigation? Are scriptwriters and producers so bankrupt of imagination that only the ancient clichés [sic] of crime films can supply them with a story to plug into? Couldn't they imagine their Eskimo characters in enough detail so that their lives would be interesting without the phony suspense of a transplanted Perry Mason episode?

Ebert charges these filmmakers with a failure of imagination, and rains down upon them synonyms for inauthentic: lame, unconvincing, ancient clichés, and phony. Of course, Ebert is

not obligated himself to imagine such authentic and interesting Inuit characters, but I wonder how he would recognize them as such. He can more easily discount the Hollywood conventions utterly familiar to a professional film critic than judge a movie about Inuits as culturally accurate.

Macdonald and Macdonald also assess cultural verisimilitude, putting themselves in the uncomfortable (for me) position of white literary critics evaluating the Native American authenticity of novels (mostly) written by white authors. And yet readers cannot help making such distinctions between the authentically (multi)cultural and the phony, even if we base such judgments on comparisons to other textual representations. For instance, Hillerman's Navajo mysteries are more authentically Indian—in relative terms—than Trainor's detective novels with an Ojibwe protagonist. More interesting to me than scoring authenticity, however, is considering how these novels, from the most superficial to the most sincere attempts to convey Native lives, incorporate this discussion about cultural authenticity.

The push for a greater variety of protagonists that brought many more Indian detectives into the Mystery genre also led to much more diversity *within* the Indian detective subgenre, breaking up the exclusively rural, Desert Southwest orientation of the 1970s novels and introducing female Indian detectives after a century of male investigators. Though still dominated by whites, the writers of Indian detective novels also became a more diverse group: for the first time, non-Indian women began contributing to the subgenre, as well as a select few Native Americans. Hand in hand with the rising appreciation of multiculturalism and the drive for greater diversity, a fascination with unfamiliar (for most readers) settings and their inhabitants, a perennial interest that has in previous eras gone under labels like "Regionalism" or "local color," encouraged writers to recruit detectives from other Indian nations and put them to

work on cases in a wide range of locales, creating some imaginative distance from Hillerman's whodunits.

Moving Beyond the Multicultural Accolades

Most of these Indian detective fictions have sprung from the imaginations of non-Indian writers, raising a slew of fair questions around exploitation, appropriation, colonialism, and authenticity. While MacDonald and MacDonald view multiculturalism as an unalloyed boon for minorities, Roderick A. Ferguson is skeptical about its promises. Ferguson charges that rather than truly engaging criticisms of its straight white male hegemony and transforming the university so that it would serve people of color, the academy coopted them by managing diversity and recalibrating its mission to maintain its dominion and allow global capitalism to carry on its self-interested and oppressive business:

power would attempt to invest the radical aims of antiracist and feminist movements of the sixties and seventies with another logic, capitalizing those movements and their ensigns, cataloging them in the very institutions that those movements were contesting.

In sum, relations of power would try to make those movements and their demands into its reason for being. (28-9)

Like Jodi Melamed, Ferguson worries that the expansion of the literary canon to include a greater diversity of voices and the institutionalization of ethnic studies departments give the appearance of social progress without helping most of those supposedly uplifted by such markers of multiculturalism:

The post-civil rights academy represented the moment when the academy and other institutions of power would widen their "agricultural" horizons, tilling and harvesting

forms of minority difference, preparing them for new horizons of success and attainment, culling those forms for the benefit of hegemony rather than the material well-being of disfranchised communities. This articulation of minority difference renders it into a good that bears the image of a minoritized subject but is too expensive to find itself in the hands of the most minoritized people. (230)

Melamed concurs in calling for a more socially engaged academy: “I concentrate on understanding how literary studies has participated in official race-liberal orders not to undermine English departments but to bring home the hard consequences of doing the easy good thing. My goal is to help manifest the grounds for a new materialist antiracism—a radically antiracist materialism—for the times” (50).

For scholars like Ferguson and Melamed, “Multiculturalism” has too much baggage for rehabilitation, and each generation must choose fresh banners for its fights. I wonder, though, what an activist multiculturalism would look like, even if it needs to find a different label. For those of us who came of age during the Canon Wars and were excited by more egalitarian course offerings and syllabi, Ferguson and Melamed provide a needed reality check on the effects of such gestures toward increased diversity. Still, encountering difference through reading was an upgrade from the purported universality of what had previously qualified as canonical literature, for both white students and those “most minoritized people.”

Multiculturalism is not only a bullet point in mission statements put out by colleges but a potent marketing tool for popular culture. But most of the Indian Detective novels answering the demand for diversity, whether written by whites or by people of color, will never find their way into a college course despite the academy’s professed value of multiculturalism. Hillerman novels surely make it onto reading menus for some Mystery courses, and “sort of” mysteries by

Sherman Alexie or Louise Erdrich probably appear on syllabi for Native American Literature courses, but the rest mostly fly below scholarly radar. I am not sure what levers might move popular culture as well as English departments toward Melamed's "radically antiracist materialism," but academics might pay more attention to indigenous images in popular culture like the Indian Detective novel, consider the messages those representations send, and think about how these fictions connect to real lives.

Against the benefit of many more people reading stories with Indian characters in the starring roles, and any empathy and understanding those experiences foster, I balance two concerns in addition to the limitations of multiculturalism to effect real progress toward a more equitable social order. What are the effects on readers of so many narratives fitting Indians into the Mystery formula? Again, the problem-solution satisfactions provided by the Mystery may give readers a half-conscious yet reassuring notion that *someone* is capably handling issues facing Indians, whether or not that is the case. Not surprisingly, given their focus on crime, many of these Indian detective novels decry injustice, but unlike other social protest fictions, they do not seem to urge any response from readers beyond enjoyment and future patronage. As Ward Churchill puts it, Hillerman's "books lack even the slightest connection to liberatory literature. They are instead the very quintessence of modern colonialist fiction in the United States" (89) because they validate existing power structures: "Readers can . . . relax, secure in the cunningly implanted knowledge that even the most obviously colonized segment of the North American population, the Indians, now agree that 'the system works' for one and all" (80). Indian heroes are celebrated for their brains and brawn, crimes are solved, and symbolic villains punished, but these non-Indian-penned detective novels, while they may build empathy toward and esteem for Indians, are not launching any demonstrations for social justice.

My second concern is non-Native writers once again controlling the effort to make Indians legible to non-Indians. Perhaps many Native writers don't feel the desire or need to explain Indians to the rest of America, but surely many others would welcome those readers and appreciate having more of a voice in the broader society's ongoing narratives about indigenous peoples. I am not arguing that non-Indians have no business writing Indian characters, however, or that people should refrain from reading fictions that aren't created by cultural insiders. Those seem to be sentiments held by Churchill, which is ironic given subsequent challenges to his own membership in any Indian community. Perhaps Churchill does not preclude the possibility that a non-Indian could write an Indian detective novel to satisfy him, but he titles his chapter on Hillerman "Hi-Ho Hillerman . . . (Away): The Role of Detective Fiction in Indian Country." I do not share Churchill's desire for Hillerman (and, by extension, his non-Indian literary heirs) to go away. Police actions on who can say what about whom stifle necessary conversations. I do hope, though, that non-Indian writers who write Indian Detective novels will take Beth Loffreda and Claudia Rankine's advice and ask themselves "not: can I write from another's point of view? But instead: to ask why and what for, not just if and how?" (17). And I hope that readers will not simply accept Hillerman and company's word on the state of Native America and will seek out Indian perspectives as well.

Given the scrutiny writers crossing cultures might expect to receive, it is surprising that so many Indian detective novels written by non-Natives incorporate reflections on authenticity, some of their plots hinge on such concerns, and much of their protagonists' character development revolves around that theme. Indian detectives created by non-Indians spend a lot of time worrying about their degree of Indianness. These anxieties occasion compelling drama, but they can also let non-Indian writers off the hook for imagining a realistic Native consciousness.

If the character her- or himself is conflicted over Native identity, how can the author be held responsible for failing to present an authentic Indian character? J. Madison Davis raises just this concern but does not develop the charge beyond a rhetorical question: “Frequently in Native American mysteries, it should be pointed out, the investigator is half Indian and half white. Is this common feature a fudge factor to avoid the accusation that the main character doesn’t convincingly think or act like a Native American?” Often, a wiser, older, more “Indian” Indian (whose point of view readers almost never get to access) comes onstage periodically to provoke, reassure, or guide the supposedly more assimilated protagonist. Such debates over authenticity are carefully contained within the narratives’ diegetic worlds; readers are not encouraged, as they might be by perhaps a postmodernist text, to think about the authenticity of the novel itself.

Along these lines of authenticity, drawing tidy distinctions between the categories American Indian writer and non-Indian writer can get treacherous. In this chapter, I will consider the indigenous investigators offered by non-Native writers, and in the next chapter discuss Indian detectives invented *by* Indians. Any such division by ethnicity or cultural affiliation can bring on reasonable objections. For instance, the rear inside book jacket of *The Tree People* (1995) announces that author Naomi M. Stokes is “part Cherokee,” but her Indian detectives are members of Washington State’s Quinault tribe. Does Stokes’s Cherokee ancestry give her sharper or even just qualitatively different insights into Quinault life than Hillerman’s rural Oklahoma boyhood attendance at a boarding school with Pottawatomi and Seminole Indians and journalism work in New Mexico do into Navajo life? The evidence from their novels suggests not, though the attempt to answer that question reveals the bind readers from outside those cultures face: unless we have direct and extensive experience with the peoples depicted, we judge authenticity mostly by comparing one fiction to other fictions or media

representations, making the issue of who produces those fictions and representations even more crucial.

The Tree People's book jacket does offer other reassurances besides bloodlines of Stokes's credibility to tell this particular tale: "Stokes is a former reporter and editor of a logging and lumber newspaper" and "she is third-generation Oregonian." Stokes works lots of convincing detail about the logging business into her tale. Presumably, she also has had contact with Quinault Indians. Still, placing someone like Stokes in the Indian writer category and authors like Hillerman with no Indian ancestry in a separate category makes sense despite difficulties like gauging the roles of biology and culture in identity. I will not argue for a pan-Indian aesthetic that divides the Indian writers from the non-Indian writers, but there are observable differences between the Mystery fictions the two groups have produced. Even in this pairing, Stokes's novel shares the spotlight among the twin sister and brother Quinault police officers, their grandfather, the white widow of a lumber company owner, and legions of minor characters as it twists through a convoluted plot and kaleidoscopically presents its world. Hillerman's novels stay close to the protagonists' perspectives as the detectives systematically uncover the perpetrators, with periodic plot-advancing third-person narration from antagonists' and other characters' points of view. As I shall show in the next chapter, Indian writers have tended either to avoid the mystery genre altogether, or to take it in different directions from the dictates of the conventional whodunit. Non-Indian writers like Hillerman, conversely, have tended to adhere much more closely to the Mystery formula.

And there have been *plenty* of entrants from those non-Indian writers. Though characters like television's Nakia Parker have yet to make major inroads into the movies and television, they would eventually proliferate in print and join Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee.

Perhaps the page made identification easier for a wide range of readers than did the screen for viewers. Unlike the detectives of his early competitors Brian Garfield and Richard Martin Stern, Hillerman's Indian detectives never actually appear on the novels' covers, allowing readers to conjure up whatever images they please. As Indian detectives in television and the movies continued to search for an audience, millions of readers were investing in Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee's exploits. Even Churchill gives Hillerman credit for consciousness-raising—"Through his efforts, an appreciable portion of the American reading public, few of whom are actually Indians, have for the first time found themselves identifying directly with native characters, thereby understanding the modern Indian circumstance in ways which have never before been possible for them" (81)—but goes on to explain why Hillerman's success is bad for Native Americans because his novels celebrate collaborators with colonial power. Whatever the proportional contributions of Hillerman's talent and the palatable messages for non-Indian America, for the first time novels about Indigenous investigators climbed the Mystery charts. It is difficult to get reliable sales figures broken down by genre for novels, but Hillerman makes *The Mystery Bookstore's* list of 22 "Best-Selling and Top Mystery Authors," quite an accomplishment given the sheer volume of Mystery novels published each year and that the last of his novels, *The Shape Shifter*, appeared in 2006.

Hillerman's Mystery-Writing Progeny

The Indian detective subgenre did not really boom until the 1990s, after Hillerman's novels routinely achieved bestseller status, but once Leaphorn and Chee were widely known, dozens of new Native American detective protagonists appeared in the 1990s and 2000s, and the subgenre continues to flourish. A few 1970s and 1980s novels had already added their

protagonists to the indigenous detectives' club: Martin Cruz Smith's *Nightwing* (1977) and *Stallion's Gate* (1986), both more suspense tales than mysteries but featuring Indian investigators; Wayne Ude's *Becoming Coyote* (1981) and Scott Young's *Murder in a Cold Climate* (1988), both stand-alone novels; and Jean Hager's *The Grandfather Medicine* (1989), first in a series featuring a Cherokee detective in Oklahoma. And then the ranks swelled in the next two decades as dozens of Native sleuths courted the reading public.

To his credit, Hillerman was generous with cover blurbs for these novels rather than trying to protect his Indian Mystery turf. Hillerman's reaction is prominently displayed across the top of *The Grandfather Medicine*'s cover: "Jean Hager gives me a journey home to my Oklahoma childhood—not just an intriguing mystery but a clear-eyed evocation of the Cherokee culture." Subsequent books in the series repeatedly present praise from the *San Diego Union-Tribune* review: "Jean Hager's novels do for the Cherokee culture what Tony Hillerman has done for the Navajo." That the *Denver Post* blurb about James D. Doss novel *The Witch's Tongue* (2004) I mentioned in Chapter One—"Doss does for the Utes what Tony Hillerman has done for the Navajo"—so closely follows this formulation indicates that Hillerman's approach to Navajo story materials has won recognition as a template other writers could and did follow.

Like *The Witch's Tongue*, other Indian mysteries that did not garner a testimonial from the subgenre's leading practitioner often got Hillerman's name on the cover through reviewer quotes. For example, while Lise McClendon's *The Bluejay Shaman* (1994) features amateur white investigator Alix Thorssen, its original paperback cover markets the book through its title, typography, and imagery as Native American, and further takes advantage of Hillerman's popularity by quoting reviewer James Crumley: "Reminiscent of Tony Hillerman at his best" (fig. 12).

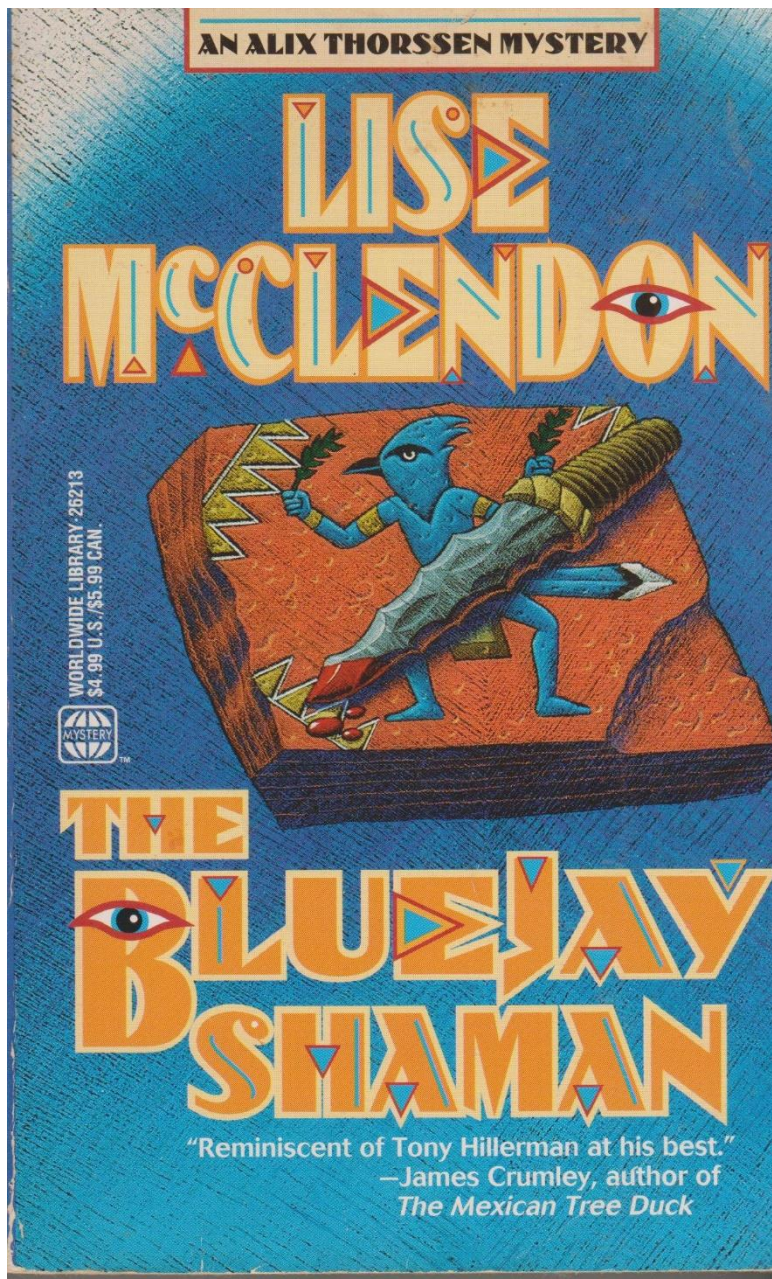


Fig.12. McClendon, Lise. *The Bluejay Shaman*. Worldwide, 1994.

I don't blame McClendon's publishers for adopting this marketing strategy, and it's not false advertising—the plot involves Native American characters and themes. But *The Bluejay Shaman*'s blatant attempt to ride Hillerman's coattails reveals that the Indian detective subgenre had finally achieved critical mass eleven decades after *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective* (1882):

inviting to writers and publishers, and identifiable and enticing for readers. In fact, there are so many entrants in the field from 1990 onward that I will have to trace patterns and themes rather than conduct a comprehensive survey with many close readings, and so I will dip into individual installments of Mystery series rather than try to chart story arcs developed over multiple novels.

Some of these Indian detective characters are sidekicks, like Connie Barnes, the “Anglo-Hopi” girlfriend of blind white sculptor and sleuth Mo Bowdre in the series Jake Page kicks off with *The Stolen Gods* (1993). Howard Moon Deer, though a junior partner in the tandem detective agency, is on a more equal footing with *his* blind white partner, ex-cop Jack Wilder, in Robert Westbrook’s series launched with *Ghost Dancer* (1998). In fact, he gets top billing—the novel is subtitled “A Howard Moon Deer Mystery”—though that’s not surprising given the series’ attempt to tap into the Hillerman audience with Native American/Southwestern designs on the covers and titles *Warrior Circle*, *Red Moon*, and *Ancient Enemy*. Like Westbrook’s third-person narration split between Howard Moon Deer and Jack Wilder, the storyline in Tom Holm’s *The Osage Rose* (2008) alternately follows junior partner Hoolie Smith, a Cherokee, and another ex-cop, J.D. Daugherty. Holm, “Muscogee Creek and Cherokee, enrolled in the Cherokee Nation, and . . . very active in Native community affairs” (“About the Author”), is one of the few Indian writers to work in the detective genre.

Rather than sole protagonists or partners, some Indian detectives are minor characters. For example, in Peter Tonkin’s *Thunder Bay* (2001), Mohawk Mountie Jeanne La Motte makes a smashing entrance, conking on the head a giant Russian seaman run amok in a police station and announcing, ““The name’s Jeanne La Motte . . . Inspector, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, ViCLAS [Violent Crime Linkage System] seconded. Who’s in charge here, please?”” (26). But the novel never develops her character, as she serves mostly as an offstage captive of a Russian

prostitute-smuggling ring. *Thunder Bay* is more hyper-violent High Seas (well, Great Lakes) adventure than *Mystery*, though it says something about the increasing recognition of the Indian detective figure that it is popping up even as a minor character in a text fairly far from the Hillerman prototype. Of course, my interest is those novels that feature Native American (or First Nations) detectives in more than peripheral roles, but the cumulative effect of Jeanne La Motte and those more central Indian investigator characters may eventually have tangible benefits for actual Indians. In the wake of Barack Obama's historic election, Manohla Dargis and A.O. Scott suggested that blacks playing authority figures in the movies helped prepare America to accept a black president: "The presidencies of James Earl Jones in 'The Man,' Morgan Freeman in 'Deep Impact,' Chris Rock in 'Head of State,' and Dennis Haysbert in '24,' helped us imagine Mr. Obama's transformative breakthrough before it occurred. In a modest way, they also hastened its arrival" (AR1). There has been no cinematic or literary run of Indian Commanders in Chief, but fictional Indian detectives and law enforcement agents may similarly help Americans get used to the idea of an Indian as the answer to Jeanne La Motte's "who's in charge here, please?"

Which Indian Detective Characters Have Hit with Audiences, and Why?

Hillerman's commercial success raises legitimate concerns over cultural appropriation such as those voiced by Churchill. Churchill scolds Hillerman's fiction for valorizing Indians who are accommodating to colonial power structures while denigrating those who are resistant (83-4). Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee are like the "Good Indians" placed in ironic quotation marks by Michael Ray Fitzgerald's study's subtitle, *Native Americans on Network TV: Stereotypes, Myths, and the "Good Indian."* These Leaphorn- and Chee-type characters that Fitzgerald labels

“regulators” were not merely convenient fictions dreamed up by white men but had historical antecedents. Paul Knepper and Michael B. Puckett ask “what is the historicity of Hillerman’s image of tribal police?” and conclude that “a review of the origins, development, and decline of the Indian police indicates that this mystery writer has captured many of the historical realities of reservation police organizations, from their hasty expansion in the 1870s and 1880s, to their equally rapid disintegration just a decade or so later” (13). Knepper and Puckett have in mind the earliest incarnations of white-sanctioned indigenous law enforcement, but tribal police agencies have taken many forms since this “disintegration,” such as the Navajo police Hillerman portrays. Knepper and Puckett mention how Crazy Horse felt betrayed by Little Big Man, who took him to the jail cell where he was assassinated: “He died that night, haunted by the image of the Indian police officer who had once fought beside him on the slopes of the Wolf Mountains” (17). But they also sympathize with these men taking on a difficult and largely thankless job: “In creating characters who demonstrate both law enforcement prowess and sensitivity to Indian culture, Hillerman has created images reminiscent of authentic Indian police officers . . . whose activities embodied the epic history of an organization positioned between indigenous Indian peoples and conquering Europeans, the United States Indian Police” (18). Churchill also notes the historical precedents for Leaphorn and Chee but has no kind words for them. Making an analogy to Nazi-occupied Europe, he argues that “in the context of other nations—Norway, say, or France—the word normally used to describe such outlooks and behaviors” as those of Hillerman’s Navajo detectives “is ‘treason’” (82). Both Knepper and Puckett and Churchill find Hillerman’s tribal cops authentic enough but differ sharply on whether fiction should elevate such characters for praise.

Like most investigators imagined by non-Indians, Hillerman's Indian detectives are fairly non-confrontational toward U.S. power, despite jibes at the FBI and other representatives of the federal government. In terms of legibility, such characters encounter the exotic in the course of investigating crimes in Indian country, and may embody exoticism for their non-Indian readers, but they generally work in familiar organizational hierarchies like police departments and live out their adventures within the confines of this most familiar Mystery genre. Following Churchill, it makes sense to question what and whose agendas are served when a member of a more powerful group tells stories about members of a less powerful group, so these Indian detectives sprung from the imaginations of white writers demand critical scrutiny beyond the celebrations of multiculturalism they have usually elicited.

My own students surprised me by raising objections to an Ojibwe detective character created *not* by a non-Indian, but by an Ojibwe writer. Reading Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* (2013), my students questioned at times the believability of her 13-year-old protagonist Joe. For example, one student found Joe's success as an investigator implausible: "I think [it's] really lucky that Joe found the gas can in the lake, I don't think that [would] have happened in real life. I think all this detective work seems a lot for 13 year old Joe" (Hunter). Others found his peer-group's drinking, drug use, and sex talk unconvincing. In her defense, Erdrich was once a 13-year-old, and she does set *The Round House* in the 1980s, closer to her own adolescence. But despite some of my students' qualms over Erdrich attempting to inhabit the consciousness of a character different from her in age and gender, none suggested Erdrich should not have written the novel. Questioning characters' credibility is an appropriate response to any fiction, and perhaps more necessary when a writer crosses gender and generational divisions as Erdrich does in creating Joe. Likewise, writers reaching across racial, ethnic, or cultural lines to imagine

characters invite such debate, and when it comes to white people telling the stories of Indian characters, careful scrutiny is especially warranted given the history of exploitation. But encouraging healthy skepticism toward these fictions need not include wishing they had never existed or calling for reader boycotts. My concern is less that white writers of Indian mysteries are trespassing than that they have drowned out Indian writers and have had undue influence over narratives of contemporary Native America. As for *this* study, I hope readers will push back critically against these ideas as well as seek out perspectives from within indigenous cultures.

The unfamiliar or The Other exerts a powerful draw on readers as well as writers. The label of “regionalism, or “local color,” is generally affixed to a class of fictions popular after the Civil War, but we cannot discount the continuing appeal of local color in gauging the Indian detective novel’s increasing popularity in the 1990s forward. Reviewers often celebrate, for example, Hillerman’s skill in evoking the landscapes and peoples of the Southwest. Some Indian detectives operate in urban settings, but most conduct their business in a place called “Indian country,” a locale that may be almost mythically fascinating for readers from cities and suburbs. More novels featuring Native American protagonists go into print each year over the last couple decades than in any previous time in American history, in large part thanks to the Indian Mystery subgenre. These detective fictions, primarily by non-Indians, provide valuable moral lessons about the historical and ongoing injustices Native Americans face, but it is not clear that these tidy problem/solution tales spur many non-Indian readers to seek out Indian writers or to engage actual Indians.

To this exotic appeal of local color that Gina Macdonald and Andrew Macdonald find a superficial treatment of culture, they oppose true multicultural mysteries in which “the ethnicity

creates a dramatic tension that allows the writer to explore two worlds at the crossroads and to enhance the mystery through providing an alien set of characters to be understood if the mystery is to be solved” (“Ethnic Detectives in Popular Fiction” 79). But they also claim that a preoccupation with culture detracts from a mystery when “the ethnicity serves a political or social function that the writer values more highly than the detection.” In such instances, “the story often begins to depart decidedly from the genre patterns” (79). Though they may not realize it, Macdonald and Macdonald are describing the approach of several Native American writers to the Mystery, writers who do not feel beholden to the genre and transform it, providing different satisfactions from the traditional whodunit, as we shall see in this study’s next chapter.

While Indian detectives have captivated readers these past few decades, a Native American protagonist was not enough of a draw to sustain any of the television detective shows Michael Ray Fitzgerald chronicles in *Native Americans on Network TV: Stereotypes, Myths, and the “Good Indian.”* Perhaps non-Indian television and movie viewers had trouble identifying with on-screen Indians in leading roles, even when those characters were portrayed by Euro-American actors like Michael Ansara and Robert Forster. Only one of these shows had any staying power: *Walker, Texas Ranger* (1993-2001). The DVD cover for the “Final Season” (fig. 13) depicts a protagonist who doesn’t *look* stereotypically Indian (understanding how arbitrary and shaped by media such judgments can be), but does look pretty darn white cowboy:

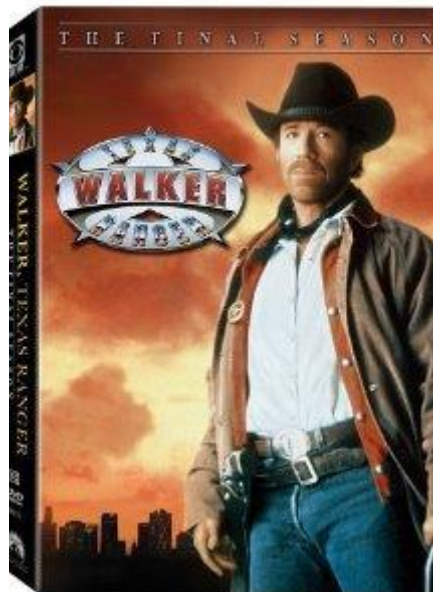


Fig. 13. *Walker, Texas Ranger: Final Season*, 2005.

Even though some episodes weave his Native heritage into the plot, Cordell Walker probably registers as a white character for most viewers, which might help explain *Walker, Texas Ranger*'s longevity compared to earlier television Indian cops. Blond, bearded, and light brown-eyed Chuck Norris played Walker, and while Norris has spoken of a Cherokee father in an interview (Berkow), he makes no claims to Indian ancestry on his official website *chucknorris.com*.

Hillerman's creations have had some success on screen, and with lead characters played by Indian actors. Lou Diamond Phillips, who starred as Jim Chee in the 1991 Hillerman adaptation *The Dark Wind*, has Cherokee ancestry. This movie apparently never got the chance to fill theater seats; *Rotten Tomatoes* notes that

Dark Wind is the fictional feature film directorial debut of noted documentarian Errol Morris and was co-executive produced by Robert Redford. Despite it's [sic] distinguished

pedigree and exceptional technical attributes including a score by Michael Colombier, and magnificent on-location cinematography by Stefan Czapsky, critics were unimpressed by the filmmaker's adaptation of the story, calling it ponderous, slow and filled with holes. The film went straight to video.

When Redford tried again to put Hillerman to film eleven years later, he scaled back the expectations by partnering with PBS and making a television movie. He also chose a Hillerman novel featuring both Chee and Leaphorn, portrayed by Adam Beach (Saulteaux) and Wes Studi (Cherokee). In *Skinwalkers* (2002), the filmmakers play up the Leaphorn/Chee relationship, dramatizing the Dialectic of Diversity, perhaps one reason the adaptation drew high enough ratings—the highest-rated PBS program of that year, with around twelve million viewers (Shively)—to give them confidence to proceed with two more such films pairing Beach and Studi, *Coyote Waits* (2003) and *A Thief of Time* (2004).

In a side plot to the main crime-solving storyline of the *Skinwalkers* film, Joe Leaphorn tries to convince his ailing wife Emma to move from the Navajo reservation back to Phoenix so she can enroll in a promising cancer treatment study. She agrees to drive the sixty miles back and forth three times a week or ride if she becomes unable to drive, but refuses to relocate: “I think . . . I think you need to understand something. I am not leaving here. . . . I can’t tell you how right it feels to be here.” Leaphorn casts his eyes downward, and Emma continues, “Oh, c’mon. I mean, childhood in Phoenix or not. Joe, can’t you . . . can’t you feel it?” Looking genuinely perplexed, Leaphorn replies, “Oh God, I wish I did. I keep waiting for something, but . . . [shrugging] nothing.” Emma’s “it” and Leaphorn’s “something” suggest that matters of identification with a place or people, a sense of belonging, go beyond precise articulation. The film contrasts Jim Chee’s confident encounters with fellow Navajo (he speaks the language) to

Leaphorn's much less certain footsteps on the reservation (the movie marks this difference more emphatically than the novels), but also shows Chee chafing as he works to make sense of police protocol and the "white" justice system. It's a smart move by the filmmakers to carry over and even accentuate this dynamic from the novels to the screen adaptations. As I have argued, the Leaphorn/Chee binary allows Hillerman to satisfy the desires of the Dialectic of Diversity much more adroitly than his Indian Mystery-writing peers. Of course, Hillerman, for all his skill in exploring this theme of struggling to reconcile and fit into competing worlds, does not introduce a brand new element in the literature by and about Native Americans. Non-Indians writing Indian detective novels, however, have almost made identity conflict a *routine* aspect of Indian experience.

Who Are the Real Indians?

With so many fictional Indian detectives invented by non-Indians over the last three decades, it is not surprising that they range from those who do not give authenticity or identity a second thought to those who obsess over it, and from those who operate smoothly within the majority American culture to those who remain further apart. Some writers, rather than creating maximum pathos through their protagonists' struggles with identity, short circuit the question of Indian authenticity. For example, Russ Hall's *Bones of the Rain* (2010) is subtitled "A Blue-Eyed Indian Mystery," perhaps an echo of the term "blue-eyed soul" for traditionally African-American music performed by whites since the action centers around the Austin, Texas music scene. Hall generally makes light of ethnic categories; a white up-and-coming country singer is named Johnny Gringo. Indian PI Travis Woodgrow reminds Deputy Cassie Winnick of his embarrassment at the moniker he's given:

“Hal’s the journalist who stuck me with that ‘Blue-Eyed Indian’ handle, by the way,” I told Cassie while we walked. She knew how little I enjoyed carrying a tag like that.

She reached to turn my face toward hers. “Yeah, they’re blue all right. The first time I saw you and your high cheekbones I knew you had some Indian blood in you.”

(79)

Travis does work some brief Native history and culture lessons into his first-person narration, but spends no time pondering his tribal identity—we only find out when he’s pressed by Cassie that he was abandoned as a baby at a reservation and given his unusual surname by Miami Indians who had been driven off Ohio and Indiana lands promised to them “as long the woods grow and the waters run” (171). Nor does Travis encounter any other Indians while on this case. But of course Hall has shielded his protagonist with that subtitle from any responsibility to project genuine Indianness, however fraught such a term is.

Robert Westbrook’s *Howard Moon Deer*, a Lakota transplanted to the Desert Southwest, also does not worry about meeting any criteria for Indianness, but in *The Warrior Circle* (1999), Westbrook makes more of an effort than Hall to guarantee that Howie is the genuine article. The title is ironic—the novel starts with a circle of white men drumming and trying to discover their inner warrior. The men find “authentic native ritual” on the web (1). This satire of New Age philosophy is another way to dodge issues of authenticity, however; by starting from page 1 with an example of inauthenticity, the protagonist looks like a “real” Indian in juxtaposition, no matter what his experiences, behavior, worldview, etc. And *Howard Moon Deer* is estranged from his Lakota origins by an Ivy League education and by living in New Mexico and therefore can be that real Indian without any social ties to other Indians: in this novel, he connects neither with his

people in his birthplace nor Native Americans in his adopted homeland. Perhaps that social test for Indian identity is an unfair burden compared to the individual proclamations of identity that suffice for many other groups, but Howard's back story relieves Westbrook of the challenge of plausibly portraying any relationships *between* Indians.

Edmonton journalist Leo Desroches, on the other hand, does worry about his tenuous connection to Native culture, especially when he gets assigned by his paper to cover aboriginal issues. In *Fall from Grace* (2012), Desroches investigates the murder of a young Indian prostitute in Edmonton, discovering she is but one of a string of such victims receiving much less than full attention from the local police. Wayne Arthurson creates a protagonist trying to rebuild himself as a reporter after a gambling addiction drives away his wife and child. Desroches is also estranged from the Indian community of his Cree mother, but does a sweat with more traditional Indians midway through the novel before resuming the hunt. This episode has little to do with the main plot, and once it is completed, Leo's concerns over his identity get lost as the novel returns the focus to solving the crime. Perhaps Leo's tentative foray into Native culture mirrors Arthurson's own biography. According to Shari Narine Sweetgrass, interviewing Arthurson for *Sweetgrass, Alberta's Aboriginal News Publication*, Arthurson "didn't grow up knowing his Aboriginal heritage," and he recalls "an attitude of shame being Native." But he wants his daughter to know her First Nations heritage and has taken her to a powwow. Arthurson is working to connect his child and himself more firmly to their Cree "background," but his novel has much more in common with mysteries written by non-Indians than those produced by writers identifying as Indian. One reviewer mentions the novel's genre conventionality in passing as he skewers Arthurson's poor handling of detail and penchant for directing readers' reactions: "If there were more going on here, these technical faults could be

overlooked, but Arthurson is aiming squarely at a by-the-numbers detective story, so the fact he can't even colour inside the lines is all the more glaring" (Berry). It is pointless to consider whether Arthurson *would* have been more transformative in his approach to the genre if he had grown up "knowing" his Cree heritage. But most Indian writers with a closer affiliation to their heritage have done just that, and without so much reliance on the tragic or even casual "half-breed" as their non-Indian Indian-mystery-writing counterparts.

In observing these various strategies for handling Indian authenticity in detective fiction, I do not mean to argue in favor of any particular one. I am not suggesting a Native American protagonist *ought* to be comfortable with her or his identity or *ought* to be self-reflexive or anguished about it, *ought* to remain true to her or his Native culture or *ought* to be able to navigate the "modern" world, or any other prescriptive claim. But besides the built-in drama these struggles with identity provide, it seems convenient that outsiders who take on the challenge of imagining a consciousness across cultural lines so often resort to mixed-heritage or otherwise alienated characters. Of the few Indian writers who have worked in the Mystery genre, some also present the "am I Indian enough? / am I too Indian?" quandary, but such questions are much less pervasive in that body of work. I wonder if non-Indian readers of Indian mysteries enjoy seeing Indian identity presented not as a settled matter for a character, but as the Dialectic of Diversity played out in an unending and sometimes painful process. Is this Indian "double-consciousness" a new way to romanticize Indian life, or a variation on the venerable tragic Indian trope? Indian writers themselves have explored this theme, but that focus seems more central in earlier works. At the very least, we should consider the effects of all these non-Indian writers in the more recent past telling a largely non-Indian audience—and an Indian audience—how difficult it is to have an authentic and satisfying Indian identity.

The first female writer to publish an Indian detective novel—107 years after Judson Taylor’s *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective: A Tale of Startling Mysteries*—also dramatizes questions of Indian identity, but without the handwringing of Hillerman’s duo. Jean Hager’s lawman apparently does not *feel* any tension over his identity, even though the novels make a point of contrasting traditional Indians with more assimilated ones. In the first Mitch Bushyhead mystery, *The Grandfather Medicine* (1989), the investigator needs to ask a culturally sensitive question of medicine man and Nighthawk Keetoowahs secret society member Crying Wolf. Since Mitch is Cherokee *and* white, relatively new to Buckskin, Oklahoma, and not so familiar with Cherokee tradition, he brings along full-blood police officer and Nighthawk member Virgil Rabbit to the interview. The narrator explains Mitch’s relationship with the Cherokee traditionals:

Mitch was still considered an outsider by many of the full-bloods in Cherokee County. It wasn’t his half-breed status that had put a wall between him and them; he’d encountered little racial prejudice among Cherokees. He was distrusted because he hadn’t been raised in the Cherokee way and therefore couldn’t be expected to understand anything having to do with their Indianness. (78)

But Mitch is too focused on extracting the information and apprehending the murderer to think further about this “wall” and what it might mean to him. We get Mitch’s perception of the traditionals’ attitude toward him, but not Mitch’s reaction to that attitude. In fact, Mitch spends little or no time in the series considering his own Cherokee identity, and as a widowed, single father, he does not fret over how or whether to raise his daughter as a Cherokee.

Mitch’s near total disregard for matters of Indian authenticity is a little surprising but does not mark his character as unrealistic. For one thing, he may share this sensibility with many

others. Gina and Andrew Macdonald survey how fully or superficially Indian detective characters engage in Native culture. After handing out lower grades to Chelsea O. Yarbro and J. F. Trainor for their Indian detectives, Macdonald and Macdonald give Hager credit for “a more serious attempt at showing cultures at the crossroads,” but downgrade their approval with the observation that she “still limits her characters to assimilated ways of behaving and thinking” even while admitting the “assimilation of the group she concentrates on” (73). Hager herself is most likely one of those people with Cherokee forebears; Macdonald and Macdonald inform us that she is 1/8th Cherokee (72), while the website *MysteryNet* has the fraction at 1/16th (“Jean Hager’s Weigh Dead”). Still, I don’t believe I am stacking the deck for my argument by covering Jean Hager in this chapter on non-Native writers, despite her Indian ancestry, because as far as I know, Hager does not identify as Cherokee or announce that she is enrolled.

Nor does Hager claim cultural expertise on Cherokees. In the acknowledgements for the first Mitch Bushyhead novel, she credits two books by Jack Frederick Kilpatrick and Anna Gritts Kilpatrick, *Run Toward the Nightland: Magic of the Oklahoma Cherokees* and *Friends of Thunder: Folktales of the Oklahoma Cherokee*, as “invaluable in the background research for *The Grandfather Medicine*,” and she receives permission from the authors’ son to reprint their English translations “in memory of Jack F. and Anna G. Kilpatrick, who held an uncommon love and concern for the recognition and preservation for the culture of their people.” The fact that Hager eschews the first-person pronoun “our” might indicate distance from the culture on which she did “background research.” At the very least, Hager is not concerned with foregrounding her personal story regardless of her sense of cultural affiliation; she has also written as Leah Crane, Marlaine Kyle, Sara North, Jeanne Stephens, and Amanda McAllister (“Jean Hager”). And Hager’s Cherokee detective novels accord with the whodunit parameters followed by non-Native

writers' Indian sleuths, while indigenous writers (or at least other indigenous writers) tend to regard the formula with no such stringency.

Gina and Andrew Macdonald categorize the four other Indian mystery writers they choose as examples (Yarbro, Trainor, Hillerman, and Padgett) and Hager as not Native American, and then curiously do not follow up on this categorization as they rank their products from least to most authentically Native American. Mitch Bushyhead and Molly Bearpaw, the protagonist of Hager's second Indian detective series, come in third place in this authenticity contest, behind Hillerman's and Padgett's characters but sharing the limits of the two creations they best: "Yarbro's Moon and Trainor's Biwaban are not even as culturally distanced as was Charlie Chan, nor in fact are Hager's Bushyhead and Bearpaw" (78). With these two characters, Hager has set the balance too near the assimilated pole and too far from the exotic for the Macdonalds' taste—"the very assimilation of her characters means that the Cherokee elements seem superficially applied rather than at the heart of her plots" (74)—but the emphasis is once again on a satisfactory melding of genre and culture rather than a character's verisimilitude and whether or how much that matters. Macdonald and Macdonald are not interested in whether an assimilated Cherokee lawman or woman is a realistic character, but in how seamlessly "Indian" and Mystery genre mesh: "Native American culture in these novels is skin deep and contributes little to the readers' understanding of the psychology of the crime, the uniqueness of Cherokee perceptions, or the social interactions of a community or family unit different from that of mainstream America" (74). I appreciate their disdain for the Native American Detective Novel as a generic whodunit with decoupage surface Indian decoration, and they do qualify their critique of Hager (though many Cherokees may not share this characterization of their people): "Perhaps the fact that the Cherokee, traditionally, have assimilated easily and quickly into

mainstream culture makes a depiction of them as outsiders difficult” (74). But for the Macdonalds, their concern for the multicultural service an Indian detective novel ought to provide “American mainstream” readers makes questioning whether *Bushyhead* or *Bearpaw* are realistic depictions of assimilated Indians less than germane. We can sense here the Dialectic of Diversity in play as the Macdonalds seek in these Indian mysteries the right dynamic tension between exoticism and assimilation to engage non-Native readers.

Following Macdonald and Macdonald’s labeling of Hager as non-Native American serves my argument because her Indian detective novels, like most written by non-Indians, adhere closely to the genre’s conventions. Her *Bushyhead* and *Bearpaw* tales are compelling *because* they satisfy the demands of mystery readers: clever puzzles, resourceful investigators, fair sharing of the clues with the readers, and enough character development to make readers care about these people. Along with the assimilationist appeal of, as Macdonald and Macdonald contend, characters limited to “assimilationist ways of behaving and thinking,” Hager also injects Indian elements such as ceremonies, legends, and powwows, seemingly to satisfy the exotic appeal of the Dialectic of Diversity, but these Native touches don’t alter the sturdy Mystery formula. As Macdonald and Macdonald claim, “despite the Cherokees and occasional Choctaw and Apache in the novels, these stories could, in fact, be moved to different settings and ethnic groups (a Mexican-American community in Texas, for example) with only minor changes” (73). Again, there’s nothing wrong with Hager constructing a well-wrought whodunit, but Macdonald and Macdonald are right that the more “exotically” Indian aspects of these tales fit into the Mystery formula rather than engage in creative dialogue with the genre.

Wise Tribal Elders Invoke the Supernatural

To some readers, a connection to the spiritual realm vouches for Indian identity. For example, Native spirituality makes a guest appearance in *The Grandfather Medicine*. A discarded hand-rolled cigarette he finds outside the murder victim's house (the victim and his wife were/are nonsmokers) leads Mitch to question Crying Wolf. Mitch suspects some sort of Cherokee ritual is involved and that the shaman performing it, if not himself the murderer, may have been a witness. Crying Wolf eventually reveals that he was asked by the victim Joseph Pigeon's brother to do a ceremony to separate Joseph from his mistress (188), and readers learn that Crying Wolf has used precious tobacco sent from the Cherokee ancestral lands in North Carolina, the "grandfather medicine" of the novel's title (143). Mitch, perhaps out of politeness, expresses no opinion on the efficacy of the old man's ministrations. When Crying Wolf says, "I don't think you have faith in Cherokee medicine," Mitch replies, "I don't know anything about it, so I'm in no position to judge" (185). Likewise, the novel does not force readers to make any judgments; we don't get the opportunity to see whether Crying Wolf's ritual would have had any effect on Joseph Pigeon's love life—and Crying Wolf insists that he did not use his power to send Joseph's soul to "Nightland" (188). When Crying Wolf later spends a night fasting on a mountainside, he dreams that the legendary "huge horned and clawed reptile . . . *Uk'ten'* flew across the sky, trailing fire" four times (151), but the source of this supernatural experience is ultimately revealed as a drug-smuggling airplane searching for a drop zone.

In the later series entry *Ghostland* (1992), the supernatural elements are not reduced to plot expeditors like Crying Wolf's dropped cigarette or explained away like Crying Wolf's dream, but the novel's stance toward their believability is still noncommittal. Just before some tribal school students marching through a wood toward powwow grounds discover a body, they

speak of a legendary predator to rival the fierce *Uk'ten'*. Teacher Charley Horn quizzes his young charges, “where did we get our dances and songs?” in an ongoing attempt to connect them to their culture, and Billy answers, “Stone Coat,” to which fellow student Stanley Dick helpfully adds, “he killed the people” (8). But beyond establishing a menacing atmosphere for this opening scene of grisly discovery, Stone Coat gets mostly lost for the rest of the novel (unlike, for instance, the way Hillerman infuses Navajo belief into his stories of crime and punishment to produce more organic wholes). Crying Wolf also uses his medicine in this novel, this time to reflect evil back onto the unknown killer. He goes before dawn to the murder scene, burns some “lightning-struck” wood, and recites an incantation four times:

Listen! You Thinker of Evil, you will take it back!

Listen! Destruction will return to the One who brings it!

My name is Crying Wolf. I am of the wolf clan.

Listen, you Seven! Peace I have restored.

Crying Wolf watches the fire’s smoke drift toward the tribal school, and the narrator spells out the implications: “The evil was at the school. The murderer was harbored there” (125-6).

Crying Wolf’s smoke is right, we learn about a hundred pages later, but we can make what we please of its accuracy, either deem it a coincidence, attribute it to the direction of spirits, or, like Mitch, refrain from evaluating it because “we are in no position to judge.” This body of Indian detective texts written by non-Indians ranges from the frankly supernatural sleuths to the devoutly rational/scientific, with a generous uncanny zone in between—novels like Hager’s *Ghostland* with supernatural aspects neither validated nor explained away. For many readers, Indian authenticity and the supernatural go hand in hand; real Indians have access to secret wisdom, often otherworldly, and Hager’s setup allows her novels to satisfy that desire for exotic

Indian authenticity through characters like Crying Wolf while also satisfying the drive for rational explanations through the much more mainstream Mitch Bushyhead. I do give credit to Hager, however, for offering at least brief third-person narration through Crying Wolf's perspective once in *Ghostland* and a few times in *The Grandfather Medicine*. Readers follow Crying Wolf's thoughts as he prepares and performs his medicine. Much more typically, the wise shaman figure's mind is off-limits to readers. Rather, we view her or him from the outside vantage of a more assimilated Indian or mixed-heritage protagonist, so the novelists can more easily establish and maintain the unknowable aura surrounding the shaman and excuse themselves from rendering the shaman's worldview from the inside.

Surviving Miss Daisy

That said, another non-Indian writer, James D. Doss, gives readers access to a tribal elder character's thoughts. Like Hager's detective Mitch Bushyhead, Doss's "part-time Ute tribal investigator" Charlie Moon, though described as full-blooded, is certainly no "traditional"; besides some Indian jokes there's not much about Charlie that seems shaped by his Ute heritage. Charlie's Aunt Daisy Perika fulfills a similar function to Hager's Crying Wolf as the bearer of tradition and therefore, supposedly, the guarantor of Indian authenticity, but that neat equivalence gets complicated by several factors.

Charlie and his relative are close, so although the Daisy character marks the contrast between rational Charlie and a more spiritual tribal life, the effect is not to set up an unbridgeable chasm between traditional and modern Indians. Second, while offering the requisite Mystery puzzles and action, Doss's tales play for laughs rather than the grim tension of the Bushyhead novels. The third person narrator's voice goes for folksy humorous rather than hard-boiled, as in

whimsical-sounding passages like this one from *The Witch's Tongue* (2004): "Once upon a merry time, Charlie Moon and Scott Parris had done an interesting piece of work with Ralph Briggs. The process was not entirely legal, but, with the assistance of the antique dealer, a modicum of justice had been done" (82). Doss's narrator apparently amused many readers (he completed 17 Charlie Moon mysteries before his death in 2012) and irritated some others, such as Jo Ann Vicarel, here reviewing *Three Sisters* (2007): "What could have been a strange and quirky story is overwhelmed by Doss's overly elaborate narrative style." Vicarel finds the novel "encumbered by a dense prose style that seems to try to imitate the wordiness of Victorian authors."

Doss's narrator seems to enjoy chattily relaying the antics of his characters. In keeping with the novels' comic tone, Daisy Perika is a feisty, eccentric, and surprisingly child-like purveyor of Native exotica; for Daisy, the "wise elder" tag gets ironic quotation marks. Further, while there is some wiggle room for interpreting the supernatural aspects Daisy brings to the novels, those elements don't allow readers to escape making *any* judgment the way that Crying Wolf's ceremonies do, for Daisy actually speaks (well, most often bickers) with the spirit world.

Finally, Crying Wolf and Daisy Perika live in fictional worlds that present authenticity differently. In Jean Hager's series, the traditional Crying Wolf emanates tribal authenticity and worries that his Johns Hopkins-educated M.D. granddaughter "had lived in the white world for so long that she now thought more like a white woman than a Cherokee" (*Ghostland* 124). Buckskin Police Department Chief Mitch Bushyhead is aware of the gulf between himself and Indians like Crying Wolf, though not in any way concerned with "restoring" his Cherokee authenticity. James D. Doss's series, by contrast, makes light of cultural differences between the shaman Daisy Perika and her ranch-owning part-time investigator nephew Charlie Moon through

their mutual teasing. The novel attempts to score points with enlightened readers by lampooning stereotypes and inverting prejudiced expectations, but once those preconceived notions are comically dispatched, nothing substantial moves in to take their place, for the winking tone does not occasion much serious reflection on identity and authenticity.

The Witch's Tongue inverts common ideas about who is superstitious when Charlie Moon and police officer Jim Wolfe investigate a crime scene in the atmospherically-named “*Cañon del Espiritu*” (31). Snow and fog have “transfigured familiar objects into nightmarish props,” but Charlie is not distracted by the strangely altered landscape: “Though endowed with considerable imagination, Charlie Moon was largely immune to these sinister portents. His practical mind was occupied with how best to complete this thankless task” (31). By contrast, the white policeman, a “sturdy product of the Oklahoma hills” (31), is open to supernatural suggestion:

High on the cliffs, there was a harsh call from an unseen raven. It was answered by a raspy echo from the opposite wall. As if summoned, a low, moaning wind swept down the broad canyon. To Jim Wolfe's superstitious ear, it was the soul-wrenching sound of a ghostly woman wailing for her dead children. This was followed by a deep belly-rumble of thunder, a diffuse flash of lightning.

Moon wondered how much evidence had been covered up by the drifting snow.

(33)

Jim Wolfe's susceptibility to supernatural interpretations makes him an easy mark when Charlie's Aunt Daisy decides to relieve him of his good luck charm.

The mischievous Daisy is not above using her reputation as a Ute healer for personal gain. When Charlie brings Jim Wolfe to his aunt for treatment for a busted lip and cuts suffered in the line of duty, Daisy scams Wolfe out of the \$26 in his pocket for “a special potion” made

“from horny-toad livers, green grasshopper vomit, and salted hummingbird tongues,” which is actually the common antiseptic Mercurochrome, and convinces him that a plastic bag is full of corpse powder. Daisy sees the turquoise pendant Wolfe is wearing around his neck when he removes his shirt so she can administer an ointment to his wounds, and she realizes it is

the very pendant that had belonged to Hasteen K’os Largo, the famous Navajo medicine man who had done a sing for Daisy’s father, when Daddy returned from France after the terrible War to End Wars. Its appearance here and now was nothing short of a miracle—and it was far too sacred and powerful an object to hang around the neck of this knowing *matukach*. Thus it was that the corrosive sin of covetousness took firm hold of Daisy Perika’s heart. (57)

She warns Wolfe that the pendant is extremely dangerous, places it under a handkerchief, closes her eyes, “mumble[s] a few words in the choppy Ute dialect,” and pulls away the cover to reveal that the turquoise amulet has turned into “poison stump dirt” (60).

Daisy later feels guilty over tricking Wolfe and stealing his good luck charm, but she rationalizes her action: “the white man would return, full of rage—determined to have his revenge on a poor, helpless old Indian woman who had wanted only to protect a sacred Native American relic. It was so unfair” (161). As so often in these Indian mysteries written by non-Indians, a serious issue, here the pilfering of Native artifacts, gets raised, but the implications never get explored. Rather, the story focuses on Daisy’s conscience. Jim Wolfe does return to her trailer when she’s out and steals the pendant and the supposed corpse powder. We are meant to applaud Daisy’s later decision to refuse the pendant when Wolfe’s parents offer it to her after his death. Daisy’s redemption is cast in a Christian light as Father Raes Delfino has long fought to win her soul for Jesus. It’s a good thing that the novel does not make spirituality the province

of any one group of people, but there's a patronizing quality to Father Delfino's well-intentioned ministrations, and the novel privileges Christian supernatural beliefs over Daisy's Ute spirituality. The novel never subjects Father Delfino's Christianity to comic scrutiny, while like a misbehaving child Daisy fears the priest will catch her performing her shamanic rituals.

Not only is Daisy's sham shamanism played for comic relief; in keeping with the novel's light-hearted tone, Daisy's "real" encounters with the supernatural are also amusing, though near the end of *The Witch's Tongue* a couple moments might make readers' hair stand on end with a sense of the uncanny. Daisy has an ongoing feud with a miniature spirit, the "*pitukupf*." In *The Witch's Tongue*, she scuffles with the dwarf in her kitchen and then bribes him with goodies, including red cans of Folgers coffee and Prince Albert smoking tobacco, to learn more about the crime committed in *Cañon del Espiritu*. When the *pitukupf* comes through with the information, Daisy thinks, "a deal had been made and a debt must be paid. She presented two red cans to the little man, secretly hoping the combination of caffeine and nicotine would do him in" (226). Daisy's companion/nemesis is a Rumpelstiltskin-like figure rather than an awesome denizen of the spirit world, a trickster who "always found a way to hold something back, or confuse her, or conceal a kernel of truth in the husk of a riddle" (226). The *pitukupf* (always italicized in Doss's text, as is the canyon's name) has his slight stature even further diminished by Daisy's attitude. Rather than fearing the elfin creature, Daisy's primary concern is Father Delfino's opinion: "The shaman was worried that by one devious means or another, the clever Jesuit would find out if she wandered into *Cañon del Espiritu*, just happened to pay a call at the abandoned badger hole where the *pitukupf* made his home for ages" (222). But the novel sounds a more serious note about Indian spirituality at its conclusion when Daisy tells Charlie she regularly converses with Jim Wolfe's ghost and relays a story she could not have gotten from any other source. Charlie

responds to the uncanny nature of the revelation: “The unbeliever felt a clammy coldness creep over his skin” (395). Likewise, Daisy cautions Charlie against swinging a bullroarer in the canyon though Charlie insists “it’s just a noise-making toy—” (396). Sure enough, thunder rumbles as Charlie makes a sound with the traditional sacred instrument and then ceases as soon as he stops: “By cosmic coincidence, silence and stillness returned to *Cañon del Espiritu*” (396). Doss has fun with the wise old shaman character type, but also casts a supernatural sheen on the mystery proceedings.

Daisy eventually comes to accept the “know-nothing *matukach*” Wolfe after he passes into the spirit world, but she has a harder time accepting the idea of a white person joining her family. When Daisy asks the first name of Charlie’s girlfriend, identified throughout the novel only as “Miss James,” Charlie says, “I’ll let her tell you” when he brings her to visit, and Daisy exclaims in disbelief, “You intend to bring that white woman to my home?” (23). Neither Daisy nor readers get to know her first name because that relationship will soon end, but Charlie is smitten by a new woman by the novel’s close. Before Charlie even identifies her, Daisy reacts predictably: “She snorted. ‘Another *white* woman’” (400). More often in popular culture, characters “of color” face disapproval from a white lover’s family instead of their own, so *The Witch’s Tongue* may jolt some readers into a more balanced perspective on cross-cultural love. And the novel makes Daisy so darn cute that it seems unlikely readers will dwell on her racism toward two women she has not even met. Charlie has no qualms about dating across ethnic lines, and he does not let his aunt’s bias deter him or interfere with their relationship as aunt and nephew.

Daisy’s attitude about suitable romantic partners for her nephew is not the only way *The Witch’s Tongue* reverses more commonly-depicted directions of prejudice. Tribal representative

Oscar Sweetwater is understandably concerned about liability after Jim Wolfe wrestles an Apache into custody, the incident that led to Wolfe's injuries. In discussing Wolfe with Charlie, Sweetwater uses the same Ute term as Daisy had to refer to the white officer, and in apparently the same derogatory tone:

“What do you know about this white man on the police force?”

“Jim Wolfe?”

“Do we have another *matukach* on the SUPD [Southern Ute Police Department] payroll?”

He's a bit testy today. “I don't keep up with the new hires. Since the last time I talked to him, Chief of Police Whitehorse might've loaded up the roster with North Koreans.” (125)

There is no sign that Wolfe got his job in a tribal police force with the help of reverse Affirmative Action policy, but it is a nice change of pace to see a white guy as a minority of one. In a sadder bit of reversed expectations, a white woman with the Indian name Kicks Dog suffers abuse at the hands of her Ute husband Jacob Gourd Rattle; white women certainly face abuse, yet “Native Americans are 2.5 times more likely to experience sexual assault or rape than any other ethnic group in the United States” (Gilpin). The Kicks Dog/Jacob Gourd Rattle relationship contrasts with Charlie's respectful treatment of his white girlfriends. Sometimes the novel works too hard to overturn stereotypes, such as when the narrator refers to diner owner Angel Martinez as “the hardworking Hispanic” (140).

The novel is wary of identities imposed by others, like the lazy Hispanic stereotype, but it has fun with the idea of constructing one's own identity. In the public imaginary, the West has long been a place to reinvent oneself, and one of the characters in *The Witch's Tongue* is intent

on doing so. The son of the imperious, intolerant, and wealthy Jane Cassidy wants a change. Despite all the novel's stereotype-busting intentions, the effete Bertie Cassidy is a stereotypical mincing fop who recalls popular queer-phobic caricatures of gay men, his flirtations with a waitress notwithstanding. Bertie comically enough seeks the help of the Indian Charlie Moon in his desire to transform:

Moon cocked his head at the pale man. "You want to be a Ute?"

Bertie threw up his hands. "Of course not—am I a silly child? Why on earth would I wish to become a feather-bonneted, spear-chucking, drum-beating aboriginal? I mean, that is the most ludicrous, most . . ." He ran out of words.

Charlie Moon took it all in stride. "The tribe will be very disappointed."

Bertie set his jaw. "I shall attempt to make my intentions perfectly clear. I want—no, I *hanker* to be a cowboy." (370)

And the punch line comes when Bertie Cassidy reveals his new self-chosen nickname to the waitress, "Butch" (390). This thin joke underlines the contrast with the novel's rugged protagonist.

Charlie the ranch owner is, of course, portrayed as the real deal when it comes to cowboys, though in the manner of many of these part-time detective characters, we rarely see him doing his day job. Charlie does not worry whether others regard him as enough of an Indian, cowboy, or anything else, which adds to his credibility *as* a cowboy—real cowboys are secure in their cowboyhood and do not need to perform it for others. Charlie may appeal to readers in large part because he is comfortable in his own skin. Perhaps he is also appealing because he is non-confrontational about his Ute identity. Charlie takes it in sardonic good humor when Bertie or his mother insults Indians, and that attitude holds in other Charlie Moon novels

such as *The Shaman Sings* (1994) and *The Widow's Revenge* (2009). Perhaps Charlie can afford to be the magnanimous rather than the angry Indian because he conducts a large and successful ranching operation without doing any obvious work on it. On the one hand, Charlie is not purely a fantasy figure because there are successful Indian businessmen and women, including ranchers. Plus, I won't entirely discount the effect of characters like Charlie, who thrive in competitive enterprises, as role models. But Doss's making Charlie the cowboy in charge may be another instance of the reassurance of readers that Ward Churchill skewers in Hillerman; Doss's novels also send the message that "'the system works' for one and all" (Churchill 80) and may give readers an unrealistic portrait of opportunities for Indians, especially since federal policy systematically shoved Indian ranchers off good western grazing lands.

Keeping It Real in Montana

Like Charlie Moon, Peter Bowen's Gabriel Du Pré allegedly spends lots of time looking at cows, but his duties as a "cattle brand inspector" never interfere with his investigations. Du Pré is a Métis living in Montana. His ethnicity makes matters of authenticity even more complex than usual since the term has hybridity built in—Métis are, by definition, descendants of Native and European peoples. They have official First Nations status in Canada but no similar designation in the U.S. The Du Pré mysteries relay plenty of their history because, as Bowen says in the author bio for *The Stick Game* (2000), "not many Americans know anything about them." Bowen realizes that with his Du Pré character, even if there aren't other Métis detectives, he is inhabiting an increasingly crowded field, for in *The Stick Game* he offers a mild parody of the Joe Leaphorns and Jim Chees of the Mystery genre. As firefighters recover a badly-decomposed suicide from a well, "Du Pré was standing well upwind with a couple Tribal

Policemen. Mid-thirties and tough. Dark glasses. Braids . . . Henry and Joe. Du Pré couldn't remember their last names though he had just heard them" (36). Henry and Joe don't do much toward solving the mystery of why this young man killed himself; it's up to Du Pré to do that work. These cops are not the bumbling foils against whom so many literary detectives shine, but they spend much of their time "on screen" wisecracking, prompting young Gros Ventré Billy Grouard, the suicide victim's friend, to observe, "That Joe and Henry they came here a couple hours ago looking for Jess, they laugh at me some and go. They are like some comedy act." Du Pré's thoughts in response reveal an understanding of Joe and Henry's defense mechanism: "Du Pré nodded. A lot of cops were like that. They had to laugh or be carried away screaming" (181). While Bowen seems playfully aware that the tribal cop is becoming a stock character (though not nearly as routine as the grim banter between partners in police stories), he works to keep his detective from being simply a type. Bowen gives his fictional sleuth an air of reality, and Du Pré's sense of identity goes beyond his Métis bloodlines.

Authenticity for Du Pré and his circle is not so much tied to ethnicity as to region and class, though he is proud of his heritage and regularly fiddles the traditional songs of his ancestors as well as his own compositions, showing that he is a creative member of a living culture and not just a curator. Du Pré does sometimes pass judgment on what is and is not truly Indian. In *The Stick Game*, he thinks of the "small but steady stream of loons who wanted to be Indians through all the reservations" (92) as well as the local Gros Ventré kids who "play at being Indians" in their hideout outfitted with "rattles. Some feather headdresses in plastic bags" (101). When one of those boys is wounded after killing two workers at a gold mine, he "began to sing in a tongue Du Pré did not know. Kid probably singing his death song, Du Pré thought, or wants to and don't know how. Sounds like a movie death song" (216). Du Pré and his pal

Bart discuss an Indian activist who wants to keep researchers from finding and DNA testing hair from prehistoric campsites:

“Ah,” said Du Pré, “That Bucky Dassault, the asshole, he is now that Benjamin Medicine Eagle? He is hiring himself out, to explain Indian religious beliefs to gold miners.”

“Why haven’t you just shot the fucker?” said Bart.

Du Pré shrugged. He couldn’t think of a good answer.

Why *haven’t* I shot the fucker?

No good reason. (16)

Forced into attending a pow-wow on the Montana State University campus later in the novel, Du Pré thinks, “any Indian pow-wow which ‘celebrated cultural diversity’ was using long words where short ones would do, and thinking short thoughts where long ones were needed” (145). He dismisses the wares for sale as “all cheap trade jewelry and other junk. Beaver skins. Bad quillwork and beadwork. Tourist stuff” (150). But it is the event’s site that really elicits his disdain: “He did not want to go to the pow-wow. He never wanted to go to Bozeman, which he hated. Fat and smug” (145). After dropping a cousin off at the powwow, Du Pré and his Madeleine try to find dinner on the main street filled with “boutiques, expensive little restaurants. Delicatessans. A bagel factory.” Madeleine declares, “there is no place here to eat” (147). After they spot a kid who “had plastered some sort of green stuff in his hair which stood up like a fin on his head” and “had a lot of jewelry on and black leather clothes,” Du Pré concurs in Bowen’s version of a Métis dialect: “‘Me,’ said Du Pré, ‘I can’t eat a place like this.’” The two “drove to Livingston and found a good restaurant and ordered steaks. The place was quiet and clean and the steaks were good and it didn’t cost all that much” (148). Du Pré’s escape from

Bozeman and its expensive fancy cuisine and punk denizens shows the series' true preoccupation. Rather than concerning themselves primarily with who is and is not a real Métis or other type of Indian, Du Pré and his circle spend much time and energy declaring who are the real Montanans.

Higher education is an impediment to achieving real Montanan status. In *The Stick Game* Du Pré relies on a geologist, an archaeologist, a veterinarian, and a retired mining engineer as he tries to prove a gold mine has poisoned a reservation's water, but these professionals variously escape the burdens of their learning and earn Du Pré's acceptance. A Montana State University professor of Geology with the amusing name David Stone ingratiates both himself and the archaeologist Big Jim Lascaux with Du Pré as he explains why Lascaux works exclusively in the field rather than in an academic department:

“Hah,” said Stone. “Jim is an honest man. Tell you something. Professors are the most dishonest, sleazy bastards on earth. Big Jim would have done murder, about halfway through the first faculty meeting. I can stand it now, I'm tenured, but the asses I had to kiss to get there will leave a bad taste in my mouth for the rest of my life.” (18)

Septuagenarian veterinarian Piney earns respectability by conducting a thirty-seven-year brawl with his enemy and best friend the physician Norris and defying the government: he flies without a pilot's license, three bullet holes in his plane's tail courtesy of Norris. Pat Weller earns points by helping Du Pré take down the Persephone mining corporation, which lives down to its name by cold indifference to the consequences of its actions. The retired engineer is not an environmentalist or labor crusader (suspect categories for Du Pré and his circle), but a bare-knuckled capitalist in his own right, having run several mining companies. Just to make sure readers get the point, even the apprentice shaman Pelon gets in on the academe-bashing. Du Pré

asks, “you got a lot, college?” Pelon replies, “Oh yeah. . . . But don’t hold that against me. I didn’t learn anything worth shit there” (137). Alcohol consumption also helps with membership in this club: “Redfield finished his drink and he got up. He had sipped just one while Big Jim and Du Pré had had, like good Montana boys, six. Each” (66). But Bowen delivers all this bluster and bravado with a sense of humor. After Piney tells the Eastern born and raised Bart that he busted his hand punching out someone’s teeth, he confesses the truth: “‘Son,’ said Piney, ‘If you believe everything Montanans tell ya you’ll be in some sorry trouble. I got bit by a goddamn dog’” (81). And somehow the fact of college’s uselessness did not get through to all of Du Pré’s offspring; while his daughter Jacqueline raises fourteen kids, the more rebellious daughter Maria studies in London.

These true Montanans also hold money in suspicion. When Du Pré and his band perform at a Big Sky Ski Resort festival—the organizer tells them, “thanks for helping us celebrate diversity” (51)—Du Pré is unimpressed with the audience, the environs, and, once again, the merchandise:

A lot of really white people in shorts and hiking boots and polypropylene jackets in vulgar colors were standing and sitting out front clapping and cheering. Some were dancing European peasant dances or passably imitating the clogging of the Gaels.

Learned, no doubt, from videos . . .

Du Pré felt like a fish in a tree. The resort was garish and the houses and condos were ugly in their efforts to be beautiful. Lots of hand-hewn beams and cedar siding . . .

There were many booths selling yuppie beers and small bottling of California wines from family vineyards once Italian and now owned by dentists and real estate brokers. (50)

After their gig, the band and Big Jim are accosted by police who “keep a close eye on the place” (55). As they speed away from Big Sky along the algae-choked Gallatin River, Du Pré thinks “high-class shit feed that algae . . . and I know where it comes from” (56). Du Pré’s sympathies lie with the working man, even those employed by the corporation poisoning the Fort Belknap Reservation. He agrees when his daughter Jacqueline says, “guys work there are just guys, some Métis, too. Good jobs are not easy to find in Montana. They are raising their families” (198). The rich have a much harder time gaining Du Pré’s favor. As a man with a vast family fortune *and* an outsider, Du Pré’s friend Bart’s campaign for acceptance by the locals has carried over thirteen novels at this point and consists mostly of taking and giving verbal abuse and spending money generously to prove he’s a stand-up guy and a real adopted Montanan. Du Pré does support Bart in his struggles both as a recovering alcoholic and moneyed Easterner.

Bowen’s Du Pré novels are actually more akin to the mysteries of some Indian writers than the well-wrought whodunits of most non-Indian writers featuring Indian detectives, in that Bowen’s novels focus on character, group dynamics, and setting. The puzzles take a back seat to presenting Du Pré’s milieu. Of *The Stick Game* an anonymous reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* writes

Gabe wears his ethnic history like a warm coat. Besides being an expert fiddler, a cattle inspector and part-time deputy sheriff, he's a consumer of large quantities of whiskey, hand-rolled tobacco and red meat. Bowen blends all these qualities into such a seamless whole, bringing to life a memorable, fallible human being, that a certain lack of heft in the plot and a sometimes meandering narrative don't seem to matter as they might in a lesser writer's work.

Each installment of the series delivers a crime and a culprit, but readers probably go to Bowen's novels more to hang out with Gabe and friends and take in what for most must be exotic cultural scenery.

Unlike most other non-Indian writers, Bowen also attempts to render an authentic Métis voice. Most of the Indian detectives created by non-Natives are mixed ethnicity or assimilated characters whose thoughts and dialogue do not discernibly differ from those of white detectives, and their "traditional" Indian characters tend to speak in the cadences of Hollywood Indians of the 1940s. Du Pré's English is clipped, reflecting his French and Cree forebears: "These ski resorts they got money for sure. Hamburger six bucks. Pretty good burger, but six bucks? You ever do that skiing?" (51). About his one good boarding school instructor Du Pré reflects, "'yah,' said Du Pré, laughing, 'She is ver' good teacher. She say to me Du Pré you a Métis and you got a proud history you ought to know more about. She bring me books. I am playing music, she teach me how to read music a little. She is a kind person'" (256-7). This voice works for some reviewers and not for others. Melody Moxley finds in the audio recording of *Coyote Wind* (1994/2005) that Bowen's "slightly French-accented dialect for Du Pré fits perfectly" and Wes Lukowsky thinks "Gabe's halting English becomes poetry," while Roland Person sees the speech and interior monologues as impediments in *Nails* (2012): "If one gets past the stilted, pidgin dialog, there is much humor, interesting characters, and a real feel for the emptiness of the Wild West." As often with less familiar regional voices, most readers are forced to either take the writer's word for their authenticity, or not.

Du Pré certainly would not worry about whether he speaks in an authentic Métis register. While many non-Indian-created Indian detectives generate interest through their identity struggles and the drama of bridging two worlds, Du Pré appeals to readers by being at home in

his element. Therefore, the series does not *need* to deploy the wise elder figure as an exotic counterweight to a more assimilated protagonist to check off the “real Indian culture” box. But Bowen offers his take on the archetype anyway, and his shaman Benetsee can be a lot less solemn than many similar characters in other series, perhaps because Du Pré does not have to be validated as “Indian enough.” His name recalls Betonie from Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977), and Benetsee lives in a similarly spartan camp by himself, though in *The Stick Game* he has taken on an apprentice whom he has saved from a computer job in the city. Du Pré typically pays one or more visits to Benetsee as he tries to crack a case, tobacco and cheap screwtop wine offerings in hand. In *The Stick Game* Du Pré happens upon Benetsee and Pelon doing a sweat:

Benetsee and Pelon sang on. The sweatlodge steamed.

Du Pré waited.

Old fucker knows that I am here, Du Pré thought, I am pissed enough to leave, he will come out. Not until then. Old bastard.

Sacred songs, Du Pré thought.

As soon as he thought that Benetsee and Pelon began to sing about how they lived in a yellow submarine. (44)

Benetsee is much more of a trickster than many of his earnest counterparts in other mysteries. When Big Jim calls Benetsee “the shaman,” Du Pré complains that “he is an old son of a bitch . . . Riddle Man,” and Big Jim replies, “they pretty much are. . . . All the ones I know are, anyway” (73). Benetsee has a good dose of the mystic to go along with the profane and comic. He is ageless and his origins are unclear. Big Jim asks, “what tribe is Benetsee?” Du Pré answers, “I don’t know” (which stretches believability), and Big Jim follows up with “how *old* is he?” Du Pré shakes his head, and the archaeologist quips, “I’d like to carbon-date his goddamn

hair” (224). Earlier, Benetsee tells Big Jim he was digging in the wrong place, helps the party recognize the outline of an ancient lake in the changing color of the grasslands, shows them where the camp was, and channels the distant past: “I first see these hills . . . They were mountains. Me, I swam in a lake that was here. Then the ice come all around, you know, except for a tongue of land goes northeast. The trail come down from there, come down from the Land of Little Sticks. Long trail” (167). Benetsee and his acolyte Pelon wander off— “we got things, do” he explains (170)—and shortly the mine engineer’s wife notices some wildlife: “‘Oh, look,’ said Alla, pointing off toward a far hill, ‘There’s a couple of coyotes’” (171). Even though Du Pré and his circle of friends will all seem pretty exotic to most readers, Benetsee increases the exotic appeal by giving Bowen’s series that sense of connection to a primordial Indianness and a whiff of the supernatural so many other medicine men characters contribute to their host texts. Benetsee is just funnier than most of them.

Mad Mel or *Mide*?

Unlike the Métis Gabriel du Pré, William Kent Krueger’s “part Irish, part Ojibwe Anishinaabe” (*Purgatory Ridge* 14) detective Cork O’Connor consciously mediates between a white and Indian world both within himself and as an off-and-on county sheriff in a mostly white town near a reservation, and his wise elder Henry Meloux has more serious work to perform as an authenticator than does Benetsee. In *Purgatory Ridge* (2001), Cork reflects for the benefit of us readers on a stand of old-growth timber at the center of a showdown among a logging company, environmental activists mostly from outside Northern Minnesota, and the Anishinaabe, who call the white pines “Ninishoomisag, Our Grandfathers”: “Henry Meloux, an old Ojibwe medicine man, claimed the trees had been protected by *manidoonsag*, little spirits of the woods. Although Cork was ever respectful of Meloux’s vast wisdom, he’d heard another,

less fantastic explanation for the trees' survival"—that a half-Swede, half-Ojibwe surveyor hid them from the logging companies (26-7). In such ways, the Cork O'Connor novels give a nod to Native spirituality without requiring readers to suspend rational belief.

To be fair, Cork contends with a constellation of Native and non-Native characters as he makes the rounds of fictional Tamarack County, but Meloux reliably comes onstage once or twice and provides the occasion for an interlude between the mystery plot's advances. Cork brings along his six-year-old son Stevie in *Purgatory Ridge's* journey into the forest primeval to consult the wise tribal elder:

After ten minutes on the trail, Cork knew they had passed onto Iron Lake Reservation land, the far northwest corner where there was only one cabin for miles. The cabin belonged to Henry Meloux, the oldest man Cork had ever known, although years seemed a feeble measure of a man like Meloux. He was a *mide*, one of the *midewiwin*, a member of the Grand Medicine Society. To many of the whites in Tamarack County, he was known as Mad Mel. Cork, however, had respected the man his whole life. (117)

To my mind, Meloux functions much like the mage character Obi-wan Kenobi in the *Star Wars* mythology. To those *not* in the know ("many whites"), Meloux is like "Old Ben Kenobi," an eccentric figure off by himself in the wilderness. Those in the know (including us fortunate readers) accord Meloux his proper stature, and Cork's recognition of Meloux's true value enhances Cork's own Indian authenticity for readers.

As Cork and son come upon Meloux tending a fire beside a lake, Meloux "didn't seem at all surprised to see him standing suddenly before him" (117). After Cork's gift of tobacco and a shared smoke, Cork asks Meloux "why the illegal fire, Henry?" (the county is under a burn restriction because of wildfires), and Meloux replies, "cedar fire. . . There's anger in the air"

(119). Meloux later remarks “I don’t sleep like I used to. Sometimes the tree frogs and me, we talk all night long” (121). Meloux then drops a hint that will further Cork’s homicide investigation. Notwithstanding this particular contribution to the plot, these scenes primarily serve to suggest Cork’s connection with an Indian supernatural without allowing that supernatural demonstrably to affect his worldview. I want to be careful here not simply to pass judgment on whether this literary character is or is not “Indian enough.” I just want to point out how the wise-tribal-elder device allows Krueger and other non-Indian writers to satisfy the exotic impulses of the Dialectic of Diversity while still offering protagonists whose assimilated perspectives accord comfortably with those of the majority audience.

The Indian Detective’s Cachet

Henry Kisor creates a similar milieu to Cork O’Connor’s Minnesota Northwoods for his Indian police officer, but on the other side of Lake Superior. In fact, Krueger contributed an approving cover blurb and credits Kisor for “a perfect evocation of Michigan’s marvelous Upper Peninsula.” Kisor foregoes the wise tribal elder figure, at least in the third installment of his Deputy Steve Martinez series, *Cache of Corpses* (2007); more “traditional” Indian secondary characters appear alongside his Lakota protagonist, but Henry Meloux has no equivalent. Perhaps the earlier novels address Steve’s apparently Latino surname, but *Cache of Corpses* mentions only Lakota forebears. Still, Steve’s backstory permits Kisor to explore thematic terrain also reminiscent of Krueger with his part-Anishinaabe protagonist Cork. Steve, like Cork and so many of their counterparts in Indian mysteries written by non-Indians, struggles with his Indian identity. He “was adopted as an infant from the Lakota Sioux reservation in South Dakota by a visiting missionary and raised in upper New York State as a good white Methodist”

(27). Steve reveals his disconnect from Native culture when he listens to his girlfriend's twelve-year-old Anishinaabe foster child Tommy Standing Bear recount a traditional tale: "Maybe [Tommy] would become a storyteller himself, one in much demand at powwows. I began to feel both envy and pleasure at his rootedness. An orphan Tommy may be, but he has a greater sense of belonging than I do. His links to his origins have never been broken" (126). But the novel has it both ways with Steve's Indianness, for he repeatedly clues us in to the way Indians are but also undermines such generalizations, often in self-deprecating manner.

Steve's slowly warming relationship with Tommy provides opportunities for such generalizations. When Steve and his girlfriend Ginny first meet her prospective foster child, "Tommy had stood up from his chair in that gravely polite fashion Indians have with strangers and had gazed at her with an unsettling calm" (34). On a hike, Steve points out a rusty railroad sign hidden by trees so that most passersby would miss it, and Tommy shows his appreciation: "I had entrusted him with special knowledge. Then he turned to me, smiled reached out a hand, and touched my sleeve. It was his way of saying 'Thanks.' For Indians, gestures are as important as words and sometimes say more" (153). Tommy soon lays some special knowledge on Steve. He rejects Steve's suggested location for burying a cache as "too low" and indicates a creek's spring flood line high on the ridge, leading Steve to think, "Tommy Standing Bear had been born to the forest." If it sounds like Steve is invoking the Indian wilderness survival gene, he immediately adds some nurture to that nature: "Someone had taught him woodcraft, maybe his father, maybe the uncle [on military tour] who was waiting to take him in" (153). Steve echoes this sentiment when Tommy says they did the right thing in not shooting wolves who were threatening the family dog, and once again makes a distinction between himself and the young Anishinaabe: "This boy knew how to live with his fellow creatures. He had been taught

well. He was a native of the forest, at one with his environment, an existence I was often painfully conscious of not sharing” (157). But Tommy is not only at home in the woods. He shares some online research he’s done on geocaching, and Steve reflects, “this boy did not lead a life of cultural isolation, as did so many youngsters on Indian reservations. His connections extended into the now and the future as well as the past. Tommy was a thoroughly modern American kid” (151). Even with the qualification (“so many”), this claim reinforces the unfortunate and unsound notion that Indians are, by and large, isolated and backward-looking, though I suppose it is encouragingly broad-minded that Tommy can be both “a native of the forest” *and* “a thoroughly modern American kid,” that Indian and American are not mutually exclusive terms in Steve’s mind. At the end of the novel, Tommy, Ginny, Steve, and family dog are inching closer to living together as a family (their adopted dog came with the name Hogan, which has Indian associations and also perhaps foreshadows their growing domesticity, a Hogan being a traditional Navajo dwelling). Ginny cares for the convalescing Steve in her home and teases that he may get used to living with her, which flusters her foster son: “Tommy, who was standing on the other side of the bed, suddenly turned and looked out the window, his face a study in suppressed consternation. *Indians embarrass so easily*, I thought, *or maybe it’s just because he’s a kid*” (282, italics in original). Here Steve makes the generalization about Indians, but steps back from attributing all of his behaviors and characteristics to Tommy’s Indian heritage.

Steve echoes his distinction between modern and, I suppose, traditional Indians when he reflects on his dislike for varmint hunting, though this generalization is based partly on his police experience: “Varmint hunters almost never are Indians, whose cultural taboo against the unnecessary slaughter of animals is so deeply ingrained that even the most modern of them shun

the practice” (202). Like Cork, Steve is uncomfortable with the glad-handing of local politics—he is running for sheriff—but attributes that reluctance to both his Lakota culture and his upbringing: “My adoptive father had taught me never to boast, and in any case, Indians are not given to self-congratulation” (172). At other times, Steve sees himself failing to measure up to supposed Indian traits. Scouring a trail for the missing Tommy, Steve remarks, “I may be an Indian, but I’m not a tracker, and I had no idea whether the sign had been left by Tommy, a deer, or something else” (245). When he takes to the air to search for the boy, Steve notes that “on every occasion” his Finnish co-pilot “spotted the target before I did. So much for the keen eagle vision of an Indian.” Sure enough, Joe first notices Tommy’s signal fire (252-3). Steve contrasts two possible interpretations of an eagle launching from a tree toward his boat on Lake Superior:

A traditional Indian might have said that the eagle was acknowledging the presence of another who shared its existence on Earth. But I knew the bird was ignoring me, that my arrival had nothing to do with its stirring, that it was scanning the waves below hoping a fat fish would rise into the shallows to be snatched with sharp talons. (271-2)

Flying solo, however, Steve identifies with the denizens of the air:

But when I took the airplane up on official duties, I secretly shed my land-bound self and became my middle name, Two Crow, mounted Lakota warrior at one with the hawks and eagles, married to Sun and Wind. I never told anybody about that. My friends wouldn’t have understood, except maybe [Apache tribal police officer of the Lac Vieux Desert Band of the Ojibwe Nation] Camilo [Hernandez] and a couple traditional Ojibwe or two. (76)

The novel concludes with the current sheriff’s funeral. Four aircraft fly over the cemetery but one breaks formation and “lifted skyward, climbing away in the classic Missing Man maneuver.”

With his final words, Steve reveals his Indian vision of the scene: “As the airplane disappeared into the mist, it was transfigured, in my Lakota mind’s eye, into an eagle” (299-300).

Roger Ebert may have been exasperated by the 1993 movie *Shadow of the Wolf* forcing an Inuit tale into the whodunit formula, but he provides his *Chicago Sun-Times* colleague with this cover blurb tribute for *his* indigenous whodunit: “Kisor’s riveting plot weaves together computer gamesmanship, gruesome forensics, local politics, wary romance, and inherited Indian instincts into a terrifically readable thriller.” Ebert invokes essentialism but also suggests how Kisor has made his protagonist’s “inherited Indian instincts” serve a “terrifically readable” tale that conforms to genre expectations.

Female Indigenous Sleuths and *Their* Wise Elders

Like Peter Bowen’s Gabriel Du Prés and William Kent Krueger’s Cork O’Connor mysteries, Dana Stabenow’s Kate Shugak series creates a vivid sense of place. Along with the regional or “local color” draw, Stabenow’s Alaskan sleuth must be a captivating character because she is the most successful female indigenous detective, judging by longevity (Stabenow published her twenty-first Kate Shugak title, *Less than a Treason*, in 2017, with another in the pipeline for 2020) and probably sales. Her appeal extends beyond the Indian detective novel subgenre. Marilyn Stasio contrasts her favorably against other women detectives:

When I'm casting about for an antidote to the sugary female sleuths who solve crimes without disrupting their social calendars, Kate Shugak, the Aleut private investigator in Dana Stabenow's Alaskan mysteries, invariably comes to mind. In more than a dozen novels, Kate has demonstrated that she can shoot a rifle, butcher a moose, overhaul an

engine and survive in remote regions of the Alaskan wilderness. More amazing yet, her outdoor skills don't alienate the rugged men in her life.

Kate's capabilities do not mean she is a female descendant of Jim Anthony, the pulp hero with no flaws and no doubts. Kate's dynamic personal life shares equal billing with the mystery plots and action sequences, and even the use of her first name by the narrator instead of the somewhat more common practice of last names for crime-solvers (Holmes, Leaphorn, Chee, Du Prés, etc.) brings readers closer to her emotionally. Stabenow works the "caught between cultures" theme for drama, but puts a refreshing twist on it: rather than return to Anchorage and embrace her work in the DA's office or participate more in her indigenous community, Kate would like to escape to the solitude of her wilderness cabin with her wolf/dog hybrid Mutt, but people and their problems, as well as her own desires, keep dragging Kate from her retreat. She feels pressures both to conform to the dominant society's expectations and to get in line with indigenous ideals, all while trying to follow her own path. Her need to create an authentic self and her exasperation at feeling that need in the first place help give Kate a depth of characterization not common in the mystery genre. For readers who have not felt such conflicting pulls (and perhaps for those who have), Kate seems a more living and realistic example of a character "caught between cultures" than many of the mopey offerings in that category.

The series features a wise elder, but she does not merely show up, dispense sage advice, bring a little supernatural tinge to the proceedings, and then get out of the mystery plot's way. Unlike some of the other Native elders created by non-Indian writers, elders who seem to exist in a "dream time" and provide a link to a more primeval Indian consciousness, Kate's "Emaa," or grandmother, Ekaterina Moonin Shugak, is a more fully realized character with a past and future:

a personal history, dreams going forward for Kate and their people, and a complicated and evolving relationship with her granddaughter. As Mary Jean DeMarr observes, “from novel to novel, Kate’s ambivalences about her [Native and white] worlds are dramatized by her troubled relationship with her grandmother, and the first six novels show her gradually becoming more reconciled to that strong and assertive woman” (122). *Blood Will Tell* (1996), the sixth novel in the series and the final one with Emaa, nicely wraps up that story arc as Emaa helps Kate overcome her reluctance to take on the mantle of tribal leadership. The love and anger between this grandmother and granddaughter produce a much different protagonist/wise elder relationship from, for instance, Du Prés and Benetsee’s mutual teasing or Cork’s warm and humble regard for Henry Meloux. Emaa engages in life (sometimes obtrusively in Kate’s) instead of being the hero’s counselor from the sidelines.

Ultimately, however, Emaa crosses into a realm beyond such worldly concerns as tangling with her granddaughter. After her death at the end of *Blood Will Tell*, Emaa attains full supernatural status as she ascends to a decidedly female afterlife, one with spirits called “Calm Water’s Daughter,” “The Woman Who Keeps the Tides,” and “Everybody Talks to Her.” This page-long glimpse into the beyond, which bookends a similar prologue, offers surprising revelations. The spirits are curious about their own origins; Calm Water’s Daughter asks The Woman Who Keeps the Tides “are we myth or marketing? Were we born or made?” (237). The afterlife is also not an exclusively Native club; The Woman Who Keeps the Tides laments that “they [it is not clear who’s in charge] let the scaff and raff from the Mediterranean run wild all over the place.” The novel ends with Ekaterina introducing herself to these deities, “call me emaa, She says” (238), and apparently earning a capitalized goddess pronoun. But between these two otherworldly bookends, the action is strictly down to earth, with no spirits in *Blood*

Will Tell outside some moving speeches about Native spirituality, so the rational mystery plot unfolds without magical interference. Perhaps that's why the Ekaterina character feels more immediate and real than most others in the wise elder category: prior to her ascension, Emaa is quite human, an important player in tribal politics, and prodding her granddaughter toward taking up that responsibility in the hope that, as the novel's title says, "Blood Will Tell."

It is tempting (and true) to say that Emaa is more connected to the mundane world than her exotic, otherworldly counterpart wise old elders in so many other Indian detective novels, but that binary opposition between worlds does not quite apply: for Emaa, the spiritual and political domains are not separate. She strongly encourages Kate to run for an open seat on the Niniltna Native Association board to maintain a majority vote against felling old-growth forests, a sacred cause for her, and she ends her plea/command in ritual fashion:

The old woman said firmly, "That's all."

The two words were the same two words used to end every story and legend Ekaterina recited daily to an ever-increasing horde of grand- and great-grandchildren jostling for position on her lap. Kate remembered Olga Shapsnikoff using the same words in Unalaska, and she wondered if the elders in Toksook Bay and Arctic Village ended their stories the same way. (18-19)

Kate's thoughts make us put Emaa in a human, social context; Emaa's Aleut authenticity is based on shared, living traditions, not solitary mysticism. Emaa is also one of the few wise elders who actually makes a mistake. Unscrupulous developers (like those wise elders, an archetype in Indian detective novels) have preyed on divisions between preservationists and pro-business voices within the aboriginal community to get Niniltna Native Association board support for National Forest rather than National Park designation for an old-growth forest so oil

drilling can later sneak in, even tilting the balance in their favor through some board members' "accidents." On discovering this plot, Kate realizes why Emaa was so adamant that Kate go into tribal politics: "Oh, emaa, emaa, she thought. This was what you were afraid of telling me. . . . It was you, and the deal you almost made with the devil. Were you so ashamed that you could not tell me? Were you afraid that when I found out you would lose my respect?" (210). Usually in these Indian detective novels written by non-Indians, the protagonist worries about measuring up in the elder's eyes, so this moment of recognition that her grandmother has needs further humanizes Ekaterina for readers.

Perhaps because her protagonist Kate Shugak is embedded in Native community and concerned about Native issues, Stabenow does not need her wise elder to represent indigenous authenticity for a detective more assimilated to the dominant culture, or even alienated from a Native one. Like Peter Bowen's Gabriel du Pré, Kate is not beset with anxiety over her Indian, or, in this case, indigenous identity; she does not worry whether she is a representative genuine Aleut. Rather, Kate resents being told how to live, which is partly why she lives in the middle of a national park far from neighbors. In a humorous example from *Blood Will Tell*, Kate consents to attending a formal dance during the Alaska Federation of Natives conference in order to further her investigation, though she would "rather have been back on the deck of the *Alvida* in the middle of the Bering Sea in a twenty-foot swell, facing down three murderers" (108), a scene from the earlier *Dead in the Water* (1993), than have to get dolled up in someone else's version of glamorous femininity for this social occasion. When her own dog doesn't recognize her in hairspray and heels, Kate almost begins ripping off the costume before she is "tucked securely" by her date Jack "into the [Chevy] Blazer and hied on her way to the Discovery Room of the Captain Cook [Hotel] before the first button was undone" (111). Kate's anxiety over the female

dress code shows how, after a century of Indian detectives imagined by men, female writers like Stabenow have brought new perspectives to gender. Kate will soon enough ditch the Westernized cocktail party getup, but she is also wary of prescriptions that she should act more Native.

As DeMarr points out, Kate is aware of her complicated lineage, reminding her grandmother in *A Cold Day for Murder* (1992) that “their own ancestors and relatives include a Russian Cossack, a Jewish cobbler, and a Norwegian fisherman, and she likens Aleuts to mongrel dogs” (120). DeMarr sees Kate’s earlier decisions as reactions against Emaa’s pressure to be Aleut: “Kate’s cynical attitude on racial matters mirrors her resistance to being forced into the mould of what her grandmother would call her people. This rebellion, of course, had led her to Anchorage, to university, to employment among so-called Americans, even perhaps to her liaison with [white District Attorney Investigator] Jack Morgan” (120). Kate’s tensions over authenticity nicely fuse the personal and the political. She complains to Jack how she resents how others cast her into roles:

“Emaa sees me as the heir apparent, no matter what she says to the contrary. [Cousin] Axenia sees me as the competition, I’m not sure for what. . . . Because I’m emaa’s granddaughter [Niniltna Native Association board member] Harvey Meganack sees me as the enemy, a tree-hugger and a posy-sniffer and a charter member of Greenpeace. [Corporate lawyer] Lew Mathisen sees me as a vote, a commodity, something to be bought and consumed. And,” she added tightly, “everyone else sees me as Ekaterina Moonin Shugak’s granddaughter, when all I am, all I want to be is just plain old Kate Shugak.” (96)

With her grandmother's death toward the end of *Blood Will Tell*, Kate accepts the mantle of tribal leadership when she energizes the crowd at the Alaska Federation of Natives conference with an impassioned plea against an oil company's play for mineral rights in the old growth forest. She is awed by the assembly's response but also moved by the possibility she can effect real change: "She was frightened. She didn't want to be good at this kind of thing. What frightened her even more was how much she had enjoyed it" (166). Kate's metamorphosis shows how she forges a Native identity in a communal context, not merely as a lifestyle choice.

DeMarr sees Stabenow's Kate Shugak mysteries as distinguished not by the crime/solution plot arc of the whodunit but by the depiction of cultures in motion: "It is principally the setting and Kate's ethnic background which make this series unique. In many other respects, these novels are similar to other hard-boiled mysteries which use female protagonists" (115). DeMarr finds the Kate Shugak mysteries instructive in the classroom, helping her students learn about "the multicultural society of modern Alaska in which Natives and Anglos, Alaskans (both Native and Anglo) and outsiders jostle, sometimes uncomfortably, against each other" (115). This claim is undoubtedly valid, but DeMarr does not go on to suggest that those students also seek the voices of Aleuts and other natives.

When Jack Morgan's son Johnny asks Kate in *Blood Will Tell* if there is a story behind the name of Mount Susitna, she replies, "In Alaska, a story always goes with it, Johnny" (40) and proceeds to invent one (without telling Johnny it's not an old legend). "A touch wistful," Johnny remarks, "'We don't have anything like that. No stories or legend like that.' He added, 'White people, I mean'" (43). Kate thinks, "Clearly, Johnny stood in eminent [imminent?] danger of rejecting his tribal myths. This must be rectified" (44). She draws a timeline for Alaska in the beach sand and begins charting Johnny's family history and Alaska history, suggesting playfully

how events transform into legend. Kate makes a useful point in light of the multiculturalism movement. If stories from underrepresented peoples are garnering greater and deserved attention, that does not mean the cultures of overrepresented (for lack of a better term) peoples should “go without saying” or not even be recognized *as* culture. In Kate, Stabenow creates a detective more engaged with living cultures, Indigenous and otherwise, than those imagined by most of her non-Indian peers. But beyond the helpful correction about what people don’t have culture or legends, this scene validates a colonial narrative: Kate’s lesson provides a mythical connection and sense of rootedness to their Alaskan homeland for Johnny and other members of his “tribe.”

Speaking of the Dead

S.D. Tooley’s Indian investigator Sam Casey also has a wise female elder in the family, her mother Abby Two Eagles, but not only are Chicago residents Sam and Abby far removed from Kate Shugak’s Alaska, they show just how superficial compared to Stabenow’s novels the Native American elements grafted onto a mystery can be. At least in their first outing, *When the Dead Speak* (1999), Sam and Abby’s connection to Indian (purportedly Lakota) culture is rather fanciful. My aim in covering a less compelling rendering of Native American characters like *When the Dead Speak* is not simply to plot new dots on the lower reaches of Gina and Andrew Macdonald’s Indian mystery authenticity scale. I mean to explore, from a cultural studies perspective, the images of Indianness such a text purveys and consider why they might resonate with an audience, especially when the creator and almost all the consumers of that text are from outside the culture ostensibly depicted.

On the novel's front cover, the title *When the Dead Speak* is followed in smaller font by the question "Does Anybody Hear?" The answer is yes, Chicago police detective Samantha "Sam" Casey can hear them. Sam's gift gets attributed to her Lakota heritage, so she's like an Indian version of Melinda Gordon of the popular television drama *Ghost Whisperer* (2005-2010), though *When the Dead Speak* predates the TV show and, at least in this novel, the dead don't *converse* with Sam the way they do with Melinda Gordon. Although the rest of the cover art as well as the tag "A Sam Casey Mystery" do not indicate Sam's ethnicity, the publishers include a small image of Indian beadwork. Between the covers, Sam's Lakota heritage does not feel quite so much like a brand label, but it certainly does not give the sense of being grounded in Tooley's familiarity with actual Indians either. To bolster her credibility to imaginatively inhabit an urban Lakota woman's world, Tooley up front gives thanks to "*Indian Country Today* newspaper for opening my eyes to the issues facing Native Americans today" and provides an epigraph supposedly from Chief Seattle: "It only takes a few words to speak the truth." And at the back end the novel offers a bibliography for both the Indian materials and the Korean war history used in the plot. I appreciate Tooley showing she's done homework, but the fact that she lists books at all underlines her separation from Lakota culture, and a title like Bobby Lake-Thom's *Spirits of the Earth. A Guide to Native American Nature Symbols, Stories, and Ceremonies* (1997) gets pretty convincingly trashed on the website *New Age Frauds & Plastic Shamans* ("Bobby Lake-Thom"), not to delve deeply into debates over paperback Indian mysticism.

Fairly early on, the novel showcases evidence of Sam Casey's Lakota spirituality. After a covert operation to obtain incriminating documents nearly goes wrong, Sam reaches for her medicine bundle:

Her right hand followed the leather strap around her neck down to a small leather pouch. With a firm clasp she nestled the pouch in her right hand. It was a medicine bundle, a gift from her mother on her twenty-first birthday. It contained sage, pipestone, tobacco, and her umbilical cord and was believed to keep the wearer safe from harm. (30)

The passive voice in the last line distances the narrator from Sam's belief and reveals Tooley's sense of her audience as people like herself who need to access Indian spirituality through a bibliography and, of course, fictions like *When the Dead Speak*.

Sam's Chicago dwelling has a tipi in the backyard. She shares her home with two wise Lakota elders, her mother Abby and some guy named Alex. Sam has a complicated parentage. Abby explains to detective Jake Mitchell that a white couple named Samuel and Melinda Casey picked her up hitchhiking in South Dakota and "helped me through some rough times." Abby repaid their kindness by working as their maid and then offering to be a surrogate mother when the couple discovered they could not have children. The Caseys died in a car wreck, and "when [Sam] was old enough to understand, I didn't have to tell her. She just knew" that Abby was her biological mother (130-31).

The novel is just as much interested in Sam and Jake's blooming love affair as in solving the mystery of the corpse discovered in a cement bridge pillar undergoing demolition and how it got there, and supernatural power figures in both plotlines. Abby and Alex argue over Abby's desire to use her spiritual powers to play matchmaker for Sam and Jake (94); Alex maintains that Sam "should marry Lakota. Besides, I have watched them, listened to them when I've worked around the yard. They hate each other. You can see it in their eyes" (80). But Abby insists that Jake is the man who appeared in her "vision" for Sam and presses on. In romance novel fashion, Sam and Abby push through their initial resistance, and lest we doubt the new couple's genuine

affection, at the end of the novel Abby reassures Jake that his feelings for Sam are true even though Abby had to give a supernatural assist (300). En route to Sam and Jake's inevitable embrace, a hawk actually gives Abby a report on the sorry state of the affair (258), and even later announces success:

It was lust, passion, and love knowing no boundaries.

Through the opened patio door, among the drone of cars on the street and Jellybean yapping, the sound of a hawk could be heard screeching in the night. (271)

For his part, Jake had earlier enjoyed an involuntary fantasy about his Indian princess:

Through the mist snaking up from the whirlpool he saw Sam. She was walking through the doorway, nude. A leather cord necklace dangling feathers and beads lay against her chest. Another ring of feathers rested around her hip hanging just low enough to cover strategic areas. Her hair hung loose, the natural curl framing her face. Lips were parted slightly, inviting, and her eyes had a sultry gaze which was riveted on him. (176)

There's nothing wrong with a novel blending passion and detection. Margaret Coel in her Wind River Reservation series has maintained romantic tension between her detectives Arapaho lawyer Vickie Holden and recovering alcoholic priest Father John O'Malley for 20 (!) books. And if mysteries written by women *tend* to put more emphasis on romance, that's just a generalization, and one that may be undergoing revision—Hillerman's Chee, for example, cycles through three complicated love affairs over the span of that series. But the way this particular novel bounces back and forth between Sam as subject and Sam as object is disquieting. *When the Dead Speak* taps into a long tradition of fetishizing the Indian, a tradition maintained in the artwork of countless romance novel covers and greeting cards, as well as popular conceptions of magical Indians, but it does so in the familiar context of a police procedural. Tooley's novel is

designed to satisfy the projected fantasies of non-Indian readers, and despite her claim of having her eyes opened to “to the issues facing Native Americans today,” her novel does not engage those issues in any meaningful way.

The Scary Indian (that Other Popular Culture Archetype)

While the wise Indian elder is still going strong and the erotic Indian maiden or brave still hangs on in popular culture, another charged image is harder to find in these supposedly enlightened times. The Indian savage that so titillated generations of readers and moviegoers is harder to track down nowadays. He continues to menace and entice us from a few Romance covers or movie screens, but we can see strong traces of that archetype in some of the hard-boiled Indian detectives that non-Indian writers have invented. In *Cry Dance* (1999), Kirk Mitchell’s two cops are grizzled veteran Emmett Quannah Parker (Comanche) of the BIA and rookie Anna Turnipseed (Modoc) of the FBI. Emmett reflects the militant character of his namesake. He is a scary Indian, the most feared agent of the BIA. Two cornered Jamaican gangsters will surrender to “anybody but you, Parker” because they are convinced Emmet will just shoot them (228). Emmet uses this reputation to his advantage but keeps some sense of humor about it. After taking out a beefy casino security guard, Parker remarks, “you haven’t heard of me, have you? . . . Well, now you got a bona fide Emmett Parker story. You’re free to embellish it. Everybody else does” (140). In the next scene when the awed guard refers to him as “Mr. Parker,” Emmet thinks, “the underappreciated utility of controlled violence” (145).

Despite Emmet’s fierce reputation, he and his partner are perfect examples of what Fitzgerald calls “Regulators” and Churchill calls “good” Indians. Turnipseed even recalls FBI agents protecting her from an abusive father. She contrasts the G-Men, with their controlled

demeanor, impersonal wardrobe, and projection of official authority, with the ineffectual local cops, but even more so with her father, whom she describes in the most racist way as dressing traditionally Indian and, perhaps related in her mind, unable to control his base desires:

Some of her strongest childhood recollections were of FBI agents coming onto the rancheria. The local deputies did nothing to stop the nightmare; they usually laughed at the drunk blanket-ass staggering around the yard and quickly drove away. However unpopular, at least the government officers brought with them an air of power. When they were present, Jack Turnipseed held himself in check, and her sense of helpless terror subsided for that brief time the serene men in the dark suits moved through the reservation. She had wanted that power for herself, she now realized, wanted it to keep her fear at a distance. (194-95)

Emmet also puts his “savagery” in the service of government control. Anna recalls Emmet’s remark that Quanah Parker “helped his tribe keep west Texas perilous for settlement for more than a quarter century” (17), and when Emmet reacts to a little barb she throws at him, she thinks about an Emmet Parker story her FBI boss told her:

He glared at her a moment, then laughed under his breath. It was a nice laugh, warm and easy. Yet, as soon as it died, he looked like somebody who could keep west Texas on edge. And infiltrate a radical offshoot of the American Indian Movement his first months as a BIA agent, going so far to preserve his cover as to endure the agonizing Sun Dance, suspended on tethers attached to his chest with bone skewers. (21)

At least in *Cry Dance*, Indians get to be powerful villains as well, even if the novel takes pains to clarify that some Havasupai were led into lives of crime by those Rastafarian drug lords from Jamaica, and other Indians were warped by an AIM splinter movement.

The Eyes Have It

Mike Harrison's white detective Eddy Dancer has an Indian partner who also embodies warrior ferocity. In *All Shook Up* (2005), Eddy recalls first meeting the intimidating Indian:

Danny Many Guns, a full-blooded North American Indian, was standing at the bar, drinking something that looked suspiciously like lemonade. He stood tall and slim in a two-piece, dark blue suit with a light blue shirt and a deep red power tie. Jet-black hair swept back from his forehead, high cheekbones and perfectly even, white-on-white teeth—a good-looking dude. He could have been a native [sic] American movie star.

Until he looked you in the eye. Then he looked downright scary. He had one very dark brown eye and one very pale grey eye. You wanted to look away and yet you didn't.

The pale grey eye stabbed you like a laser beam. (85)

Danny in short order takes out a rude “redneck cowboy wannabe” and his friend (86), but he's no simple brute—we soon discover that Danny is a “Harvard business graduate” who “made his fortune playing the stock market” (87). Like Emmet Quannah Parker, Danny bears the marks of the brave, pectoral scars incurred in an odd hybrid sweat lodge/Sun Dance ceremony, but the text has it two ways. Danny gets warrior credibility by facing the ordeal: “As a teenager, he'd been expected to spend the night in a kind of sweat lodge. It was a shelter built of branches and hung with brightly coloured cloth. Inside, two sharpened hooks, attached to chains, hung from a pole high in the ceiling. It was a rite of passage from childhood to manhood” (105). But upon completing the test, he also guides his people past such barbarous practices: “After that, he made

a promise never to permit such a thing again. He worked to change the very nature of the sweat lodge, to bring it back as a place of healing, a place of cleansing, and never again a rite of passage. At first, there was much opposition but he persevered until, eventually, reason won and his people agreed to work with him” (106). Reason eventually wins in almost every Mystery novel, but this is a particularly jumbled triumph of enlightenment. First, Danny is tied to no specific Indian culture; he’s introduced as a “full-blooded North American Indian,” and I can’t recall Eddy Dancer narrowing it down later with his first-person narration. And Danny is both dragging his reluctant people toward modern reason *and* restoring an earlier state of “healing” and “cleansing.” In blending the savage warrior and the progressive in a business suit, Danny Many Guns is a poster boy for the Dialectic of Diversity, signified perhaps unintentionally by “one very dark brown eye and one very pale grey eye.”

Mr. Means Means Business

Roland Means harbors no such progressive sentiments. Stephen Solomita’s part-Indian lawman Roland Means, whose name echoes American Indian Movement activist Russell Means, fits squarely in the hard-boiled tradition with a good dose of macho Rambo thrown in. Means has the street smarts of a film noir detective along with the Vietnam experience and backwoods survival skills of Sylvester Stallone’s part-Indian Vietnam veteran. Though employed by the New York Police Department in *A Good Day to Die* (1993), Means is—predictably—a lone wolf with unorthodox methods, as he explains to Vanessa Bouton, the captain who would like him to team up with her to apprehend a serial killer: “‘If you wanted somebody to conduct a textbook investigation,’ I said as calmly as possible, ‘you could have chosen any one of a hundred detectives. You came to me because you thought I could get results in a hurry. My problem is

that I don't think you're willing to do what's necessary to get those results'" (31). Roland's *means* mostly involve intimidating and hurting bad people, earning him the nickname "Mean Mister Means." Means trains vigorously in his own brand of martial arts and brings an impressive arsenal of weaponry into the fight against New York City's criminal element.

Solomita chose the novel's title for its purported Indian warrior associations, but *A Good Day to Die* does not do a whole lot with Roland Means's Indian ethnicity; that component of his ancestry seems mostly just an attempt to add to the character's general badassery. As with many of these mixed-heritage Indian detective characters, narrator Means early in the novel offers an explanation for his Indian ancestry, one that completely excuses the writer from imagining Means as connected to any living Native Americans or their cultures:

My father was a full-blooded American Indian, a wandering Cherokee and a straight-ahead drunk. . . . My father, or so the story goes, was saved by an itinerant Pentecostal preacher a month or so after my mother gave birth. Dad hung around for six months, trying to convert dear old mom, but finally gave up and headed west to rejoin his people.

That was the last time anybody in the town of Paris [New York] laid eyes on him. (13-14)

We learn later that Means's father is dead, and Means shows no interest in connecting with Cherokee relatives or, for that matter, his abusive, alcoholic mother's family. Of course, the crime plot dominates the novel, and, to be fair, no readers ever asked about Philip Marlowe's cousins. On the other hand, Chandler's novels never made Marlowe's ethnicity a selling point.

Means does, however, flash back frequently to his difficult childhood in the Adirondack woodlands, and those memories help readers see how he evolved into a vigilante. His mother had scared him with the "cannibal injun," "the boogeyman she used to control me when she was too tired or too drunk to use her hands. Seven feet tall and red as a fire engine, the cannibal injun

came in the night to sink his glistening white teeth into the soft flesh of disobedient children. Like half-Indian me, of course” (67). Hiding out in the dark forest from his mother time after time, Means transformed himself into the thing to be feared: “What I think I did was become Mom’s cannibal injun. Big joke on Mom, right? Not that I eat human flesh. Like any other wraith, I feed entirely on spirit” (68). So Means gets to be the scary Indian, displays his Cherokee blood in his appearance—“it didn’t take me long to shave; I don’t have much of a beard, an inheritance, most likely, of my Indian father” (146)—and has absolutely no contact with other Indians, much like his New York City predecessor television detective John Hawk (who at least tells *one* story about growing up with an Iroquois father and uncle). The novel attributes Means’s skills in the woods to his long experience hiding out from his mother and her lovers as well as the subsistence hunting he needed to do to survive, rather than to some Indian gene, but it cannot resist making an emotional link to his forest-dwelling forebears. As Means makes a perilous stream-crossing during a hike through the mountains to reconnoiter a suspect’s isolated home, he thinks, “I should have been afraid, but I wasn’t; I just couldn’t bring myself to believe the forest would turn against me. As far as I was concerned, that wilderness was as alive as it had been to my Indian ancestors. I’d spent years placating the spirits that called it home. Paying them homage until I won their respect. And their trust” (250).

Despite such vague connections to Indian culture, Means still suffers racism *as* an Indian, and therefore gets to battle such prejudices. In a scene that does nothing for the plot but gives readers the chance to cheer on our hero as he beats up a redneck (rednecks now being society’s most acceptable racial villains), Means and the black Captain Bouton stop in an Upstate New York roadhouse for lunch. In the parking lot, said redneck baits the two plainclothes cops with “Hiawatha, I presume. . . . And little black Sambette” (177) and gets swift justice from Means.

In hard-boiled fiction like Solomita's, readers not only get to enjoy in grotesque detail the degradations and tortures inflicted on victims, but also get a charge from righteous violence rained down on villains by society's protectors.

The hard-boiled diction even extends to Solomita's own persona, as he expresses a concern for accuracy in the "Acknowledgments," starting in slang: "Gotta thank two friends of mine. Jim Apello for his hunting insights and Dake Cassen for dredging up memories of Vietnam firefights. Their help and their patience provided many of the crucial details that (hopefully) make *A Good Day to Die* authentic." But this burden of authenticity does not extend to imagining his character with an Indian culture and perspective.

The Indian Warrior Masquerade

There will probably always be a market for tough guy fiction, and perhaps even for updated Indian warriors like Emmet Quannah Parker, Danny Many Guns, and Roland Means. Many readers don't find such protagonists appealing—witness the success of Hillerman's more wholesome duo—but some writers have figured out how to resurrect the savage boogeyman, Means's "cannibal injun," as an *antagonist* and even increase the scary factor with a tinge of the supernatural while trying to avoid the penalty for offending modern sensibilities. Lise McClendon's aforementioned *The Bluejay Shaman* (1996) is a complicated tale of Indian artifacts and art theft, new age women's groups, and an anthropologist wrongly accused of murder in Montana. The real villain appears to be a crazed Indian medicine man, but he is unmasked as a white professor high on peyote and Indian culture. Academics are popular culprits throughout the Mystery genre; perhaps it's the joy of humiliating smug know-it-alls.

Mark T. Sullivan's *The Purification Ceremony* (1998) scares readers with a similar setup. When a mixed-blood woman tries to reconnect with her cultural roots and her Micmac father's woodsman legacy by leaving the suburbs and booking a hunting trip to a remote British Columbia lodge (on the other end of Canada from Micmac territory, by the way), she finds herself trapped by a blizzard with the other unlucky guests as a man in a wolf cape systematically hunts them down. This gruesome horror novel teases readers with a savage Indian figure only to reveal another white academic who, overcome by grief at the accidental shooting of his wife by hunters and twisted by hallucinogenic drugs, has "gone native" to exact his revenge. Unlike *When the Dead Speak*, the supernatural elements, after providing eerie atmospherics and suspense, are tidily explained away. Both tales operate like the long-lived children's cartoon *Scooby-Doo*: they flirt with supernatural horror, but their monsters turn out to have the "perfectly logical explanation" that reassured generations of television-viewing kids. Thus McClendon and Sullivan can offer the same kind of forest demons that have haunted Americans for centuries yet insulate themselves against charges of racist caricature when the Indian costume is stripped away from the white antagonist.

Fantastic Indians

Aimée and David Thurlo set their Ellah Clah series in the normal world, but with Lee Nez, they are wholly in a paranormal universe; no *Scooby-Doo* unmasking in these tales. *Second Sunrise* (2002) introduces Nez as a Navajo cop who gets turned into a vampire by Nazi bloodsuckers during a raid on a top-secret World War II Army convoy transporting plutonium in New Mexico. Thanks to the quick work of a Navajo shaman, Nez is only partially transformed by the vampire bite: he still ages, only much more slowly, and he can brave the daylight with

sunglasses and a steady supply of sunscreen. The novel continues his story in the present day when Nez has established a new identity as state policeman Leonard Hawk. The novel devotes a lot of time to explaining what Nez can and cannot do as a partial vampire, as well as his struggles to reconcile his condition with the women in his life over the decades. Navajo skinwalkers are attracted to Nez because, as the novel teaches us and we just have to swallow, vampires are the natural enemy of skinwalkers. Besides fending off skinwalker attacks, Nez must take on the Nazi vampires, who have returned to the desert in search of the lost plutonium, which they plan to sell to terrorists. Questions about Nez's Navajo authenticity are pretty silly given the novel's supernatural premise, but *Second Sunrise* still manages to head off serious reflection on Lee's life as a Navajo. Readers are, in fact, given a pass on considering any issues confronting the Navajo besides supernatural threats like those skinwalkers:

“Good morning, Officer Hawk. Lose that fine-looking FBI partner of yours already?” The sergeant, a red-haired Hispanic Lee recognized as Isaac Jaramillo, pointed his finger at Lee, a gesture, unbeknownst to Isaac, that was considered threatening to Navajos.

Lee had long ago learned to ignore cultural ignorance of basically decent people and look for their positive qualities. Also, today his mind was on other more important things than raising other people's consciousness. (258-59)

Many of the Indian detective novels written by Native Americans are not so understanding toward “cultural ignorance.”

Leader of the Pack

In Patricia Brigg's fantasy series, a skinwalker gets to *be* the hero. As Mercy Thompson explains, "I'm a shifter—Native American style. . . . Better known as a walker. I change into a coyote" (*Night Broken* 36). Mercy joins a pack of werewolves in the Tri-Cities (Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland) of Washington State and operates in a fictional universe that gleefully mashes together mythologies from any cultural source. For instance, in *Night Broken* (2006), the eighth of eleven titles in the series, plus a couple graphic novels, Mercy and her pack battle Guayota, a volcano spirit from the Canary Islands. Like many fantasy novels, *Night Broken* spends much time explaining the rules of its supernatural world or reinforcing them for returning readers, but also throwing new ones into the mix whenever it is convenient for the plot mechanics. This particular novel fills in Mercy's Indian back story and even includes a couple dream/vision encounters with old Coyote himself, but again, it does not make sense to consider how well or not this fantasy accords with Native traditions; it is probably enough just to note how "Indian" works as a plausible explanation for magical powers in popular culture. These fantasy protagonists, Indian or otherwise, activate their own version of Chad Uran's "Dialectic of Diversity": they must be exotic enough to hold readers' interest, but also familiar enough to engage readers' sympathy. Shape-shifting Mercy certainly has the exotic covered, but it's fun how *Night Broken*, between the showdowns with volcano spirits and other supernatural threats, filters a conventional soap opera theme through werewolf pack dynamics: Mercy's Alpha Male mate's ex is threatened by a supernatural stalker, seeks protection in her old home, tries to manipulate pack sympathies away from Mercy and toward herself, and attempts to steal Alpha werewolf back. And Mercy's job is a nice mix of quirky and down-to-earth: she fixes vintage Volkswagens, definitely making her the only coyote shape-shifting Indian Volkswagen mechanic

in the universe (though she shares her fantasy niche with Faith Hunter’s Jane Yellowrock, who mashes together Navajo mythology and Cherokee identity as “the last of her kind—a skinwalker of Cherokee descent who can turn into any creature she desires--and hunts the undead for a living”).

Alas, Poor Raven!

One way to attempt to avoid questions of cultural authenticity is to invent a tribe, as Manly Wade Wellman did with the fictional Tsuchah for his 1940s David Return stories.

Another way is to set the action in prehistoric times, as J.M. Hayes does with *The Spirit and the Skull* (2014). Raven, an older Spirit Man among the first wave of immigrants to North America, both discovers the murderer among his band and, finding himself a conscious skull in the modern world (you read that correctly), witnesses the environmental degradation, and remarks to a scientist wearing glasses (Raven names him “Ice Eyes”):

“So I’ll exist in a world without herds or hunters or prey? Where The Mother, who keeps us all in harmony, no longer exists? You’re saying I’ll spend eternity as a skull on display to perfect people who won’t understand I was once a living, breathing man with wants and needs? Separated from the woman I love? I’d rather die!”

I laughed. I’d rather die? That seemed to be exactly when my troubles would begin. (138)

Of course, Raven issues his condemnation of all things modern and technological from the pages of a published book, which is often a sticking point with back-to-nature texts. But Hayes does a nice job imagining Raven’s Paleolithic life, and once readers suspend their disbelief in animate caveman skulls, the juxtaposition with modern times is compelling.

Another Indian Joins the Tea Party

Rather than using an Indian protagonist to infuse his novel with the supernatural and teach ecology, Jerry Leppart stays mostly in our prosaic modern world (his hero has a dream vision—as close as the book gets to magic) and uses his detective to construct a different sort of morality fable. Half Dakota and half white, Billy “Two Bears” Simpson is a Saint Paul Police Department detective in *Headwaters* (1998) and *Pest Control* (2000). Leppart’s novels, published by the apparent vanity press Galde, have likely not reached many readers, so it is less urgent to ask what cultural work they do than to ask the same question about Hillerman’s best-selling novels or even the lesser-known Indian detective offerings from major commercial presses. Still, I find *Pest Control* noteworthy, and not because of the Indian detective character himself or the routine (if gruesome) cat-and-mouse plot. Rather, I am interested in how the novel makes its Indian detective represent a political stance. It is no news that non-Indians have *always* found Indians symbolically useful, and more recent history has offered the Indian as proto-hippie and embodiment of New Age spiritual wisdom. The military with its Apache helicopters and Tomahawk missiles has deployed the Indian as symbolic warrior, and automobile companies have sold rugged Sport Utility Vehicles called Cherokee and Navajo. Leppart enlists his Indian character in service of a libertarian political strain that would eventually coalesce as the anti-government, anti-bureaucracy “Tea Party” movement. His novel *Pest Control* falls into a hard-boiled tradition of “real Americans” taking on and taking out society’s cancerous elements.

In *Pest Control*, an online network of former soldiers is killing lawyers, hence the title; the cover places a briefcase-carrying man wearing a suit and sunglasses in a rifle scope’s crosshairs. In a lengthy and chatty confrontation—really a Socratic dialogue—with the Minnesota assassin in the final chapter entitled “The Warrior,” detective Billy Simpson asks, “so

you're going to kill all the lawyers?" The terminally ill Special Forces veteran Robert Seeman replies, "we're only goin' to kill the bad ones . . . the egregious ones," but jokes that "it's too bad that ninety-nine percent of lawyers give the others a bad name" (245). Seeman believes the justice system has come unmoored from concepts of right and wrong: "Look, there are murderers, obviously guilty, that walk free. And their lawyers are celebrated. They say, 'Look what I did. I got this obviously guilty person off. Aren't I a good lawyer?'" (244). In his rambling manifesto, Seeman invokes the Indian as an example of natural law: "We are all born with a sense of what is right and what is wrong. It is innate. Look at your heritage. The great Sioux nation. You did not need jails. Because everyone knew what was right and what was wrong" (248). With the words "I love my country. . . . Tell them I loved my country" (257), Seeman ends his part in the crusade against legal pestilence with a bullet in his mouth.

Seeman's use of the Sioux to represent a healthier social contract almost exactly echoes a Lakota elder's sentiments in the second of two earlier sweat lodge scenes. In the first, Billy briefly interrupts his pursuit of the lawyer killer to seek advice from tribal elders because of a recurring dream in which he wrestles to the ground a cavalry soldier attacking a native village but discovers the soldier has no face. Red Eagle asks, "are you searching for someone right now?" (110) and sends Billy forth with the advice "your vision will come again. Your vision will be complete. It is then that you will find the person you are seeking. It is then that you will find your enemy" (111). Billy returns to the sweat lodge when a recurrence of the dream reveals "it is my face under the hat of the blue coat" (197). Red Eagle interprets the dream as "a struggle between those two cultures within you" (Billy's Dakota name "Two Bears" suggests his duality) and, in a similar formulation to Seeman's, expresses Billy's frustration as a policeman: "You work hard to bring people to justice and you see them go free because of a system that has long

since lost the meaning of what it is to be just. Their only concern is the laws. Only the laws are not honored. The laws are allowed to be manipulated. The laws are not honored and are used to achieve injustice” (197-8). In the very next chapter, Billy ignores the letter of law to achieve what he believes is justice. He lets a young burglar who has surrendered his weapon in a hostage taking go free because, as Billy explains to the confused perpetrator, “I know your life has been one shit bag after another. . . . But you made a right choice now. Do you understand that? You made a right choice” (207). Billy gives the young man the chance to continue to make right choices rather than handing him over to the ineffective and unfair justice system.

The novel invests Billy with maverick credibility even though he works in that justice system, and his long, straight, black hair is the visible sign that he won't knuckle under to the rules. Billy's new partner is the inexperienced cop Kelly Stewart, a white woman who, like Billy, was promoted to detective over longer-serving colleagues because of diversity directives. The two begin to bond over the fact that they are both not wanted by the racist and sexist police department. “I like your hair,” remarks Kelly, and asks, “do they give you any static for keeping it that long?” Billy replies, “it's part of my heritage. . . . They'd give me shit about something else anyway. So I wear my hair this way because I want to” (34). Later, as Kelly is developing an unprofessional and ultimately consummated crush on Billy (she also faints several times during perilous action, making one wonder about her career choice), she contemplates what the hair signifies: “The cheekbones were high and the smooth skin a healthy tan. She listened to him talk; the quiet, relaxed demeanor. To the point. But not forceful. She looked up at the shiny black hair descending to his shoulders and thought of the freedom” (59-60). Billy and his flowing hair represent the life unfettered.

Robert Seeman is also attracted to Billy's coiffure: "American Indian? . . . I like the hair" (239). The murderous Seeman is the ostensible villain, but the novel concludes by reinforcing a foreshadowed correspondence between the two "warriors," Billy "Two Bears" Simpson and the visionary Robert *Seeman*. During his final long-winded political treatise, Seeman neglects to click on a follow-up "are you sure you want to delete this file?" from his computer when he attempts to erase the names and addresses of the other lawyer killers. Billy moves the cursor to "No," but looks down at the "warrior at parade rest, the back of his head blown away, medals pinned to his bare chest" and decides instead to delete the file and allow the murderers to continue their project in anonymity (257-8). Then Billy walks onto the house's front porch and peels away the signs of his police detective identity:

He brought his left forearm up to shade his eyes from the sun. He felt the warmth of the sun on his body. He took his arm from above his eyes and untied his tie, stripping it from his collar and throwing it to the ground. He closed his eyes and raised his face to the sun. Unbuttoning his shirt, he stripped it off and threw it to the ground. He stood there, bare chested, head back, facing the sun. He brought his arms up and out and held them there, palms up, Christ-like. He felt the warm sun on his skin and the wind blowing through his hair.

The wail of sirens in the distance grew closer.

"Niyehca," he said. "Know thyself." (258)

Finally, we get a tribal Ayn Rand vision of "Two Bears" and his horse on "the boundless plain of Dakota Territory": "*They step forward in a land governed by basic truths, where honesty, integrity, and truth are meaningful concepts; a land where justice is shielded from the pests of unbridled self-interest. They step forward in a land where one is bound only by the limits of his*

power and the honor of his intentions” (259, italics in original). The detective genre has provided plenty of vigilante fantasies, and Billy’s “stepping forward” by allowing the lawyer murderers to proceed is just a particularly vicious brand of Libertarianism. The Noble Savage has been invoked so often in support of communitarian ideals that it is striking to see here the Indian made legible as the ultimate individualist.

The novel, however, tries to have it both ways. Billy and Kelly both endure prejudice from the St. Paul Police Department. As Billy explains, “the ‘Brotherhood’ does not like minorities. . . . And women” (34). Captain Hardy embodies this attitude:

He picked up a pen and started drumming on the desk. “I don’t like the mayor mandating the advancement of female recruits past experienced officers in the name of political correctness. My God, woman, there have been officers on the line for fifteen years, busting their humps for the citizens, and you waltz in here with a mandated gold shield.”

The pen beat harder on the desk. “Same thing with Simpson. Operation Head Start sort of thing. Not enough minorities on the Force.”

Hardy begrudgingly admits “well, at least [Simpson’s] doing good work” before complaining “but goddamnit . . . I don’t like politicians telling me how to run my police force!” (11-12). The boorish Captain Hardy makes life difficult for the protagonists, as bosses are wont to do in police procedurals, though Kelly later admits to Billy that she understands Hardy’s point of view: “Yes, I was hired and promoted somewhat because of political correctness. But I want to be a good cop. And I’m trying my best” (27). The novel’s apparent support for Affirmative Action with its beleaguered minority and female police protagonists, however, is oddly out of synch with the rest of its politics. Readers are supposed to cheer on Billy and Kelly in their trailblazing efforts, but there is no recognition that not only politicians but also laws and lawyers have a lot to do

with their opportunities. *Pest Control* advances the naïve and dangerous idea that everyone knows what is right and wrong but the legal system gets in the way of natural law. It is not at all clear what so-called natural law would have to say about fairness and police promotion policy, or what everyone *knows* is right in such Affirmative Action cases. But fantasies of clear right and wrong answers for everything are seductive, and in *Pest Control* an Indian detective and a frustrated veteran represent a purer state before those bad lawyers took over and stopped caring about right and wrong.

No matter to what purpose non-Indian writers put their fictional Indian detectives, and no matter how earnest or perfunctory their approach to the protagonists' cultural authenticity, they tend to follow genre rules in bringing Indian characters and subject matter *to* the Mystery. In the next chapter, I will show how the relatively few Indian writers working with the Mystery much less often share that fidelity to its formula.

Chapter Six

Native Writers Adopt/Adapt/Resist the Mystery Formula

By the 1990s, after a century of sporadic sightings of fictional Native sleuths, the Indian Detective novel had become a recognizable subgenre. Until then, such characters were invented almost exclusively by non-Native writers. Even though these depictions of Indian characters and cultures in Mysteries have largely taken over the functions of the Hollywood Western as a popular culture source of Indian images, I would not place them under the “Native American Literature” banner nor be happy should they bump literature produced by Indians from a Native American Literature course’s reading list. But these short stories and novels are worth studying as entrants in the broad project to make the Indian legible, a project nicely suggested by Sherman Alexie’s “Crazy Horse Speaks”:

I sat across the fire
 from Sitting Bull
 shared smoke and eyes
 We both saw the same thing
 our futures tight and small
 an 8½ by 11 dream
 called the reservation. (15)

Alexie’s image conveys how legal documents plus force confined Indians into rigid boundaries resembling a standard sheet of paper. Likewise, the rectilinear space of the novel pins Indians into familiar genres such as the Mystery. Non-Indian writers tend to follow the conventions of the Mystery genre with their Native American detective tales, but Indian writers are much more likely to push back against the “box” of the genre’s formula. Generally, indigenous writers have

resisted the genre's problem → solution satisfactions to tell stories without tidy closure or the reassurance that justice has prevailed.

Todd Downing's Subtle Subversions

The first Indian to write whodunits, Todd Downing (Choctaw), adheres closely to the genre's dictates. Downing published ten mysteries in the 1930s and 40s, beginning with 1933's *Murder on Tour*. Seven follow the investigations of U.S. Customs Agent Hugh Rennert in Mexico and along the border, and three feature the playfully-named Texas Sheriff Peter Bounty. James H. Cox asserts that "Downing achieved, as an American Indian fiction writer, a level of success matched only at the end of the twentieth century by writers such as Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) and Sherman Alexie (Spokane and Couer d'Alene)," with eight novels reviewed by *The New York Times*, thirteen European editions or translations, and even a short-lived Broadway adaptation of *The Cat Screams* (1934) in 1942 (642). Yet today Downing's name rarely comes up in conversations about Native American literature, and his novels are not well-known among Mystery aficionados either. Arun Kumar writes that Downing's Golden Age mysteries "certainly stand out for their plots, atmosphere, fair-play clueing and the blending of the Mexican landscape and its legends (in a very superior way) in to the structure of the plot." He also observes that "modern readers certainly owe their thanks to Curt and Coachwhip publications for bringing these titles back from oblivion." I am not sure why Downing's fictions did not have more lasting appeal with the Mystery crowd, but Wolfgang Hochbruck suggests they did not fit the mold for inclusion in the category of Native American Literature.

Hochbruck argues that "Native American literature did not exist before Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*." As evidence that prior to *House Made of Dawn*, "Native American

literature' was not perceived as an interrelated corpus of texts," Hochbruck reports that the 1969 Pulitzer Prize-winning was "ubiquitously hailed as the first novel by a Native American" despite novels written by Indians "before Momaday was even born" (205). Hochbruck explains how works like Downing's did not register as authentic Indian writing as the search for Momaday's literary ancestors got underway: "When in the 1970s scholars started looking for pre-Momadaya specimens of 'Native American literature,' they usually followed the 'paramount storyline' (Clifton 1989:31) adopted by many anthropologists and other scholars, which lamented the inevitable destruction of Native American communities" (206). James A. Clifton, in turn, draws this idea of a paramount storyline from Edward M. Bruner, and Hochbruck seems to miss some of Bruner's nuance in transmission through Clifton.

Just to avoid possible confusion, "paramount" uncapitalized is not a nod to Paramount and other Hollywood studios pumping out their Indian representations, though I am not accusing Hochbruck of this misapprehension. Clifton means by this term "what Edward M. Bruner calls the primary contemporary narrative structure that underlies" representations of Indians, and Clifton notes that structure's mutability: "Times and their pivotal urgencies also change, the demands of patrons of the paramount Indian narrative with them. So enhancements and elaborations of the storyline regularly appear" (30-1). Hochbruck fails to convey Bruner's timeline for these changes. Bruner claims a rapid shift in that structure over a decade or two after World War II: "In the 1930s and 1940s the dominant story constructed about Native American culture change saw the present as disorganization, the past as glorious, and the future as assimilation. Now, however, we have a new narrative: the present is viewed as a resistance movement, the past as exploitation, and the future as ethnic resurgence" (139). If Bruner is right about the exploitation/resistance/resurgence narrative supplanting the doomed Indian storyline

for anthropologists studying Indians, perhaps that change had not yet registered for Hochbruck's "1970s scholars" trying to build an Indian Literature canon, possibly because many had not heretofore been paying attention to contemporary Native American cultures.

Hochbruck notes that the first novel published by an Indian, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta, The Celebrated California Bandit* (1857) by John Rollin Ridge (Cherokee) has "hardly any 'Indian' content" and by "the rules set by the post-1960 paramount storyline . . . hardly qualifies as Native American literature at all" (206). The same goes for Downing's fictions. Not only are Downing's novels interested in Mexican culture rather than Indian (as arbitrary as such distinctions can be), but his first protagonist Hugh Rennert is not a doomed Indian enacting the "paramount storyline" of the disintegration and assimilation of Native cultures but a white man who remains intact through scrape after dangerous scrape, as is the tendency of heroes in these commercially successful Mystery series. Likewise, I see no mention of Indian ancestry or affiliation for Downing's other detective, Sheriff Peter Bounty.

Downing *does* meet the criteria for what Hochbruck calls the biographical "second wave of research for Native American texts"—"If authors claimed or were found to be of Native heredity, their products were considered to be Native American literature" (206)—and his tales of lawmen navigating Mexican and borderland criminal milieux may pass a content test as well, even though they do not feature the sort of "Indians" that the term brings to most readers' minds. Hochbruck asserts that *The Cat Screams* (1934) "does suggest an intimate knowledge of Indian material," but he also points out that it "contains no direct or indirect indication of the author's ethnic background" (210). Hochbruck cites a 1934 edition published by Doubleday, but my 1934 Popular Library edition makes a point of Downing's hereditary credentials on the back cover (and collapses the aforementioned opposition between Mexican and Indian): "He is

especially qualified to write about Mexico, an Indian country, since he is one quarter Choctaw, his paternal grandmother having been one of the survivors of the Trail of Tears, when the Choctaws were forced to migrate from Mississippi to Indian Territory in 1832.” Still, Downing’s selection of the Mystery genre and his white detective protagonists probably kept these novels out of Native American literature conversations then and since, and Cox believes two other factors contributed to their later exclusion from an emerging Native American literary canon: “Downing’s neglect in part has to do with the fact that his books went out of print so quickly,” and he “also didn’t write about the kinds of American Indians that were interesting to many scholars: not the nineteenth century Plains Indians of so many Hollywood movies, but the activists and otherwise politically engaged Native people of the civil rights era” (Evans). Perhaps now that more critics recognize resistance to prevailing narratives as a powerful gesture, Downing’s work will be understood as a counterpoint to the “paramount storyline” and be more routinely included in the story of Native American literature.

But in ways besides avoiding the doomed Indian plot or Bruner’s older version of a paramount storyline, Downing was riding rather than bucking trends. Given Downing’s interest in Indians in action—these “activists and otherwise politically engaged Native people” Cox identifies as Downing’s subjects—it is surprising he chose not to write any of his mysteries about a Native protagonist. Hochbruck believes Downing’s sense of the market steered him away from putting an Indian detective in the starring role:

With its density of form, its respectful treatment of indigenous material and its rather hideous drug-related killings, *The Cat Screams* reads like a predecessor of Tony Hillerman’s novels in topic and form if not in style and tone. The main difference from Hillerman’s novels is that the main protagonist is white. . . . Downing . . . apparently

guessed that his audience would accept a police officer of Indian origin only in the form of a slightly comical Mexican: “Backed against the wall of the washroom was the Aldamas police officer who looked like a pure-blood Indian, acted like an Andalusian and was named Miguel O’Donojú which is Spanish for Michael O’Donohue” (Downing 1941: 221ff). (210, quoting Downing’s 1941 *The Lazy Lawrence Murders*)

Not only did Downing tailor his protagonists to readers’ expectations, he also wrote his novels to accord with the day’s literary fashions, if not the emerging tough guy style of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. Cox proclaims that he enjoys “Downing’s mastery of the conventions of detective fictions—classical British rather than hard-boiled American” (Evans). Cox shows that Downing consciously worked within the established parameters of the mystery, quoting Downing’s own treatise on the subject of writing detective novels: “there is a premium for originality in tales of crime . . . [b]ut this originality must lie within certain prescribed bounds, and until the writer is familiar with these he is venturing among pitfalls if he gets off the beaten path” (652, brackets in Cox). *The Cat Screams* shows Downing’s familiarity with that beaten path in its setting—travelers abroad and expatriates quarantined in a Mexican hotel, anxiously awaiting the next inexplicable murder—and its ratiocination. Here Hugh Rennert thinks through the coalescing clues:

On the surface it looked so simple, now that some of the bothersome details were beginning to straighten themselves out in his mind. That remark of Riddle’s, for instance. Rennert understood it now. And he knew who had removed the pillowcase from Shaul’s room. He catalogued in their places the manuscript which he had found in Shaul’s trunk, the blotting papers abstracted from the various rooms, the poisoned cognac, the bruise upon Gwendolyn Noon’s elbow, Madame Fournier’s shattered crystal.

And yet (he felt in his pocket for a cigarette) did everything dovetail so nicely together? There was the flight of the cook, who he felt sure had purloined the idol from Madame Fournier's room. And the sickness of Esteban. Was there some other force at work in the house, some force whose workings were too devious for his straight-thinking mind to follow? (145)

Fans of Agatha Christie et al. can be sure that despite the best efforts of that devious force, everything will indeed dovetail together nicely by the last page.

But if Downing was conventional in his approach to constructing Mystery novels, and if at least some of his books' dust jackets drew no attention to him as a Choctaw, Cox argues that he put those works to political ends that grew out of indigenous identity:

In an era in the United States of menacing cinematic Indians, indigenous Mexican peons obstructing modernization, and anti-Mexican hysteria fed by the Great Depression, the novels represent an extraordinary public challenge to the dominant U.S. views of indigenous Americans and indigenous and nonindigenous Mexican nationals as well as to the contemporary (and still prevailing) narrative about the flow of violent crime in North America from the south toward the United States. (647)

The detective genre in and before Downing's time was not apolitical, whether we consider the implied conservatism of classic British mysteries or the overt sociological commentary of American hard-boiled novels, but Downing puts the genre to different purposes than perhaps any of his contemporaries. And while we should not collapse cultural or ethnic affiliation and political perspective, it is reasonable to say Downing's Choctaw identity informs his concern for indigenous peoples as well as his refusal to portray them simply as victims: "As two postcolonial settler nations vie for power—economically, politically, narratively—and the

neocolonial agents of the United States descend on Mexico, Downing finds indigenous people in a vulnerable position but with resources available that help them to escape the fray” (Cox 647). For instance, in this exchange from *The Cat Screams* between Rennert and fellow American hotel guest Mrs. Giddings, the echoed Lost Generation sense of ennui is unmistakable, but it is hard to imagine these particular politics expressed in the works of many other contemporary writers. Gazing over the sun-drenched postcard of a Mexican town, Rennert remarks, “I always feel that it is going to fade away—like a mirage, before my eyes,” and Mrs. Giddings replies

“That’s it—” she spoke softly—“a mirage. And like most of the beauty of life, one keeps expecting to see it fade away.”

He studied her covertly. *This is not the same woman*, he was thinking, *who told me in such a matter-of-fact voice that Shaul was dead.*

“In Taxco, at least, it does not fade,” he said.

“No,” a trace of bitterness was in her voice, “but it is like life, too, in that its beauty is built upon ugly things. What made that church, this town, possible? The slavery of thousands of Indians who labored to build it and to bore into these mountains for silver. Just so that old José de la Borda might ease his conscience before God and that we might sit here and rest our eyes. Like life, it isn’t worth so much pain and suffering.” She looked up at Rennert and laughed in a low, throaty fashion. “Excuse me,” she said, “for talking that way, but I’ve been feeling moody today—too tired, I suppose.” (102-3, italics in original)

Gidding walks back from her comments, and Rennert offers neither dispute nor assent, but the anti-colonial critique is nonetheless right there in a 1943 Popular Library Mystery. And for all the novel’s ratiocination, Downing sounds a cautionary note about the Mystery’s explaining

power when Dr. Parkyn asks Rennert “how well do you know Mexico?” and he “frankly” responds, “the more I live here the less I know about it” (128). Again, we witness the Dialectic of Diversity in operation with a well-made Mystery played out against an exotic and unknowable landscape, but Downing’s novel at least calls power relationships between peoples and nations into question even while working in a variety of the genre—classic British or British-styled whodunnits like Agatha Christie’s that came to be known as “Golden Age” Mysteries—most conducive to exonerating the existing social order by identifying and casting out its malcontents. Downing rightly decided that social commentary would reach a broader contemporary audience if couched in a recognizable genre and filtered through a protagonist with whom most readers could readily identify.

Two Indian Protagonists Take on Bats and A-Bomb Spies

After Downing published his final Mystery in 1941, indigenous writers seem to have avoided the genre altogether until Martin Cruz Smith features Native American leads in *Nightwing* (1977), his supernatural-tinged horror/suspense tale about vampire bats menacing the desert Southwest, and *Stallion Gate* (1987), an historical thriller set against the backdrop of the Manhattan Project. As noted before, *Nightwing* is more adventure story than mystery, but it does have the Hopi/Tewa lawman Youngman Duran trying to discover the truth about mysterious deaths, so it falls within this study’s purview. *Nightwing* was a best seller, and the Indian investigator, also proffered by non-Indian writers Hillerman, Brian Garfield, and Richard Martin Smith in the 1970s, is one of its many apparently crowd-pleasing elements. Reviewers on *Amazon.com* note how Martin Cruz Smith transports the smash hit *Jaws* to a much drier setting. Along with those exciting and deadly bats, Cruz blends in romance across an ethnic/cultural

divide between Youngman Duran and white medical student Anne Dillon; a scientist, Hayden Payne, with a secret that tortures him; a lapsed white Quaker trader with a Hopi wife and two daughters; a scheming Navajo leader more interested in deals with oil companies than in doing the right thing to stop a plague outbreak; and the outcast Hopi Abner, considered a witch, who does a ceremony that (maybe) unleashes the vampire bat evil.

Nightwing trades on the “lost between two worlds” drama that charged Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and some of its forebears. As a teen, Youngman has success selling landscape paintings to whites, and he adopts a short hairstyle and puts on a sports jacket. Youngman recalls Abner denying him his victory after he won a footrace against locals before heading off to college:

“This boy is not Hopi. Give the prize to a Hopi. Otherwise, all my clan will leave.” The priest was Abner.

“I am Hopi and I won,” Youngman protested.

“You are empty. I see inside you and nothing is there. This prize is only for real people.”

Youngman fits in no better at college or in the military, where he was court martialed and thrown into prison for six years (24-5). Present-day Youngman is still not entirely sure where he belongs. Investigating strange livestock mutilations, Youngman describes a wealthy rancher converted to Mormonism as estranged from Indian ways, but then reflects on his own tenuous Hopi identity: the “bastard doesn’t even walk like an Indian any more, Youngman thought with a sense of irony. For more years than he cared to dwell on, he hadn’t walked like an Indian himself” (28). Yet to his love interest Anne, Youngman is “too bitter, too silent, too lean, too dark. Too Indian” (60). Youngman does not feel “too Indian” or even at times Indian enough,

though he reveals himself as something of a Hopi insider when he tells the shopkeeper Franklin “I need some cornmeal, rope, a white sack” to begin a proper Hopi burial rite for Abner (47). As in many other Indian detective tales, Youngman’s wrestling with his Hopi identity signals psychological depth without actually going into depth—the narrative foregrounds the battle with the bats.

Nightwing was popular enough to spawn a 1979 film of the same title. As the Popular Library edition of *The Cat Screams* trumpeted Todd Downing’s ethnicity, *Nightwing* used Martin Cruz Smith’s Pueblo, Senecu del Sur, and Yaqui ancestry as a marketing tool. Reviewing the novel as the movie version was about to debut, Peter G. Beidler remarks how the novel’s cover announces that Smith “comes naturally by his interest in the American Southwest and its Indians, for he is one-half Pueblo” (155), but, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Beidler laments what he characterizes as a lost opportunity to portray Southwestern Indians accurately to a broad audience who will likely receive few countervailing representations. At least *Nightwing* sends the message that a Hopi can be an active and effective hero, unlike the parade of Indian villains or victims in print and on screen before Indian detectives regularly began playing the agent of justice in the 1970s. Smith’s novel also satisfies both impulses of the Dialectic of Diversity: readers are teased with the notion that the exotic Abner releases the evil through a ceremony, and the Hopi Youngman Duran, in the assimilated role of a policeman, contains the threat. Still, *Nightwing* does not follow the emerging Hillerman script that scores of non-Indian writers would soon adopt. The supernatural horror eclipses the novel’s interest in whodunit.

Stallion Gate’s Sergeant Joe Peña is also a strong Native American protagonist. Joe is much more comfortable than Youngman circulating among people of different cultures; the Pueblo Peña is J. Robert Oppenheimer’s chauffeur during the Manhattan Project, as well as a

renowned prizefighter and accomplished jazz pianist. Though he does not share Youngman's gnawing doubt over Indian identity, he faces discrimination as an Indian, such as in this exchange with the condescending German expatriate scientist Fuchs:

"It must be interesting to be an Indian." Fuchs followed Joe's measured step.

"To be free of civilization, to live simply as men and women with nature."

"You mean go naked?"

"No, I mean defy all bourgeois standards of behavior. You understand what I mean by bourgeois?" (49).

With his musical and boxing prowess, Joe feels an affinity with a Black jazz great and gets identified with a legendary Black fighter. While driving General Groveland and Oppenheimer around the proposed test sight, Joe "wished he could listen to the car radio and hear some big band from Albuquerque or, if the ether gave the lucky bounce, a jazz station from Kansas City. Ellington, like a black Indian in an invisible canoe, paddling through the clouds. Paddle, Duke! Rescue me" (52). And the lieutenant governor of New Mexico, trying to cajole Joe out of boxing retirement, remarks, "Joe used to be the Indian Joe Louis until that nigger music got to him" (82). But others wield this Indian/Black comparison as a slight to both groups. Like *Nightwing's* Youngman Duran, Joe Peña has run afoul of military law (readers apparently enjoy these insubordinate leads); Joe is only out of the brig serving as Oppenheimer's driver so he can feed a Captain Augustino intelligence to counter spying threats. When Augustino reprimands Joe for performing jazz late into the night rather than staying focused on gathering information, he asks, "By the way, do you know the difference between a nigger playing the piano and an Indian playing the piano?" When Joe replies, "no, sir," Augustino says, "funny, neither do I" (16). Lest one think Augustino's racism is casual, he has an entire odious historical narrative

that he shares unbidden with Joe: “‘Sergeant, tell me,’ the captain whispered, ‘have you ever thought of this as the Century of the Jew?’ . . . ‘Marx was a Jew by blood, you know. The worldwide Communist movement started with Marx. The Russian Revolution was largely led by Jews, such as Trotsky. Every country on earth, even China, is fighting for its soul against Marx.’” Joe asks, “what was the last century?” Augustino answers, “that was the Century of the White Man,” and Joe offers, “sure wasn’t the Century of the Red Man” (30-31). But Augustino himself is similarly downgraded on a racial scale by Klaus Fuchs, though it is not clear if this passage conveys Joe’s assessment or the narrator’s gloss:

Fuchs seemed to regard Augustino the same as he did Joe. The captain had a sallow face but his hair was thick and glossy as fur, so he had the animal quality that also clung to Joe. It was as if Fuchs and Anna Weiss had evolved to the next step in human development, leaving Joe and the captain behind, a pair of Stone Age predators. (15)

So *Stallion Gate*, in chronicling this front in the effort to defeat Hitler, is as interested in recreating a 1940s racial milieu as in solving a mystery. And the novel is more suspense yarn than whodunit, though Joe tracks a spy and thwarts an act of espionage at the Trinity test. But *Stallion Gate* veers away from the standard Mystery denouement, where the hero still stands as the culprit is led away in shackles, in that neither the spy nor Joe himself survives the blast. With *Nightwing* and *Stallion Gate*, Cruz puts the Indian detective to different purposes than his non-Indian contemporaries Hillerman, Garfield, and Stern. Certainly, *Nightwing* and *Stallion Gate* show Indigenous protagonists solving puzzles and overcoming challenges, but neither novel offers the assurance that Indian detectives will remain on patrol against injustice heading into the future the way Hillerman’s serial sleuths do.

Tag Ropes in the Criminals

William Sanders (Cherokee), on the other hand, writes more traditional whodunits with tidier resolutions. Like Todd Downing's Hugh Rennert, Sanders's detective Taggart "Tag" Roper is white—kind of a Jim Rockford (of the hit 1970s television series *The Rockford Files*) type who lives in a trailer, used to be a reporter but now writes western novels, and works part-time as a detective. Given that Tag writes western historical novels, "Roper" as a pun is not hard to see: a cattle roper tosses a loop around an errant steer and subdues him, and a detective lassos a criminal. And like playing a game of tag, Tag attempts to put his finger on the perpetrator(s) in three novels. Tag unmasks a fraudulent televangelist who commands a powerful media enterprise in *The Next Victim* (1993). Roper also stars in *A Death on 66* (1994) and *Blood Autumn* (1995). Tag takes on another sort of corporate villain in *Blood Autumn*, a greedy energy company; this plotline resonates with the historical exploitation of resources on Indian lands. While an Indian writer creating a white detective is not wholly unprecedented—witness Todd Downing—I am aware of few other examples, only Tom Holm's J. D. Daugherty (paired with an Indian partner) and Micah Hackler's Sheriff Cliff Lansing, discussed below (unlike the scores of non-Indians crossing cultural boundaries in the other direction to write Indian detectives). Sanders uses his white protagonist's relationships with Indians and encounters with other whites to bring sharp political commentary organically into his narratives.

Especially in *Blood Autumn*, Tag's Cherokee girlfriend Rita and her artist brother Tommy give Sanders the opportunity to ask and answer questions and make observations about Indians through the protagonist's thoughts and the characters' dialogue. Rather than relaying cultural information about Indians through interior monologues that no human would actually conduct—cultural insiders probably would not articulate deeply-held knowledge to themselves—

or through an intrusive narrator, Sanders provides Tag, a fellow with strong opinions but a willingness to learn, as a proxy for non-Indian readers. For example, when Tag is told his girlfriend's "cousin" Chris Badwater was charged with murdering a rural Oklahoma county sheriff, his plausible narration teaches readers about Cherokee family networks without sounding too much like a Sociology lecture:

I'd met quite a few of Rita's relatives over the last couple of years; her brother Tommy and I were on pretty good terms. But I knew that I'd barely had a token sampling of her family, which, being a Cherokee family, was far more extended than the classic European-American variety. Indians have their own ideas about blood and how it works. Chances are this 'cousin' was somebody who wouldn't even have counted as a relative by white rules. That didn't mean the relationship would be any less real to Rita, or the obligations less binding. (11)

Similarly, Tag schools readers on the intricacies of ethnic identity in his home state:

Racial categories can be very confusing in Oklahoma. One person might be regarded as an Indian, despite a considerable degree of white blood, while another citizen with exactly the same ethnic makeup might be defined as white with some Indian blood. And it's not uncommon for the same person to shift back and forth across the line, becoming part-white Indian or part-Indian white, according to the social and legal situation of the moment. (14)

When Tag shakes hands with the crusading indigenous journalist Lester Bucktail and finds that "his grip was soft and loose," he quickly adds that "Indians traditionally regard a crusher grip as the mark of an aggressive prick" (75). And Tag relays to readers the meaning of a song at a Cherokee funeral: "Later Rita explained that this was a very old song, traditionally sung at

funerals. On the Trail of Tears, when as many as a third of the Cherokees in the world died—a worse toll than the Bataan Death March; a higher percentage than the Holocaust—it was sung so many times that it became almost a national anthem” (176). This is the sort of information that all Cherokees there would know and would therefore remain unsaid without the respectfully curious white character Tag on the scene.

And Tag seems to score extra enlightenment points as a white skewering white stereotypes of Indians. Interviewing Chris’s devastated grandfather, Tag thinks, “there is a widely held belief among white people that Indians never show emotion. Whoever dreamed up that piece of bullshit should have been in the kitchen of that trailer that day” (34). Later at the old man’s funeral, Tag relates how “various people stepped forward and told little anecdotes about the deceased—some pretty funny, too, not at all what white people would consider appropriate at a funeral, and there was a good deal of laughter” (177). These interior monologues would not sound artificial coming from an Indian (or even “part-white Indian”) protagonist, but generally Tag, because of his detective work and personal life, comes across to non-Indian readers as more of a fellow traveler learning about another culture than someone forced to interrupt the action and explain cultural information so outsiders can keep up with the plot.

As a white man, Tag can also participate in attitude-revealing conversations an Indian might never hear. Tag’s girlfriend Rita explains why he rather than she must go to Sizemore County to investigate: “I’m the wrong race and the wrong sex to get any answers. They’d laugh in my face” (21). But Tag is privy to comments such as the deceased sheriff’s daughter Felicia declaring how open-minded she is about race, especially when it provoked her father: ““Of course Daddy wasn’t too happy about me going to the powwow in the first place. He didn’t like

Indians,' she said, and sighed. 'Didn't like me being friends with them, but I feel like, you know, somebody's cool, they're cool. Who cares about all that race shit?'" (185). When Felicia's wheelchair-bound mother confesses to the murder but explains it was an act of self-defense against an abusive husband, Tag notes how quickly the public rallies behind her: "Emily Jordan had captured the sympathy and even admiration of a great many people; it would have been unseemly to bring up her apparent willingness to let an innocent Indian kid take the fall in her place. Very few of the news stories, and none of the opinion columns and magazine essays, mentioned Chris's name at all" (254). He confronts Emily Jordan and Felicia's older sister Paula with their indifference to Chris's plight, and they reveal an astonishing lack of empathy:

". . . both of you were willing to let Chris Badwater take the fall. That didn't bother you?"

Paula looked strangely at me, as if I'd suddenly announced that Jesus Christ was waiting in my car.

"What," she said, "like I'm going to worry about what happens to some damn Indian? Get real."

Emily Jordan's pale cheeks showed the least bit of a flush. But her voice was steady as she said, "That was unfortunate, Mr. Roper. But I had to look out for my own blood." (267)

This sense of taking care of one's own, Tag discovers, also applies at society's broadest levels. Sizemore lawman Webb Mizell explains how he will frame the Indian activist group the War Party for Tag's imminent murder at Mizell's hands, as villains will do in these mystery novel scenes, and Tag exclaims, "you're going to wind up with a big spectacular trial. Double murder, militant Indians—you're just asking for a media circus in Redbud." Confident that he can avoid

scrutiny and continue profiting from Sizemore County's lucrative drug trade, Mizell declares that there will be no trial: "'Oh, grow up, Roper. Since when has the government given a shit about Indians' rights? The feds don't want to know,' he said. 'Their own hands are none too clean'" (230). Lines like these *could* have been delivered by Mizell to an Indian detective—it's not as if he's shy about baring his prejudices while standing on this deserted road and holding a gun—but Tag hears the unvarnished opinions of white characters about Indians, shared in confidence to a fellow member of the white tribe.

Though Tag takes on the assignment from Rita, he certainly does not fancy himself a detective. Checking into a cheap hotel in Sizemore County, Tag contrasts his exploits with a typical mystery hero's: "In a proper novel or movie, this was the point at which the detective would get out his Smith and Wesson and check the loads, maybe even take it apart and clean it, before strapping on the old shoulder holster and going out to find exciting clues and meet horny women in dark bars." Tag reassures himself and us that "I wasn't a detective" (55-6). Like his modesty about his Cherokee cultural knowledge, Tag's self-deprecating humor about his investigative efforts endears him to readers, who might be turned off by a tough guy with too much swagger. Periodically throughout *Blood Autumn*, rendering the protagonist more human and less generic, Tag draws this contrast between himself and popular culture representations of the gumshoe. Frustrated by the stony reception he gets in the Sizemore County town of Redbud when he starts poking around for answers, Tag reflects, "I mean it was *humiliating*. All right, I'd never claimed to be a real investigator; genuine detective work is a highly specialized job requiring serious training, and the 'amateur sleuth' of popular fiction is a severely improbable figure." But Tag pushes on, reminding us that he "used to be a professional journalist" (96).

When Tag tracks down the deceased sheriff's estranged daughter, the scene does not play like Hollywood:

In all the books and movies, when the detective finally finds the Mystery Woman dancing in a sleazy club, she always turns out to be far and away the best dancer in the house: too good for such a cheap dive, a pale flame leaping gazellelike about the stage, so magnificent that even the rowdiest lechers in the audience fall silent from sheer worshipful awe....

Paula Jordan, however, simply wasn't all that good. (169-70)

And in his final bloody encounter with crooked local law enforcement, Tag notes that "movies and popular folklore have created an exaggerated picture of the destructive effects of shotgun fire" (240). But despite all his disclaimers, Tag gets the detective job done, even prompting Tommy at one point to exclaim, "By God, Roper, that's real detective shit. I'm impressed" (123). Readers will likewise be impressed by Tag's dogged pursuit of justice in the face of fierce opposition.

Sanders's set-up of the white detective as first-person narrator allows the cultural teaching and political commentary to emerge from plausible exchanges between characters. For example, when Tag and Tommy visit the wrongly accused Chris Badwater in jail, the novel takes on that pervasive "who's the real Indian?" theme, but without filtering it through the culturally conflicted Indian or part-Indian protagonist who most often internalizes such debates. Looking up from his cell and seeing the unfamiliar Tag, the young man asks Tommy, "So, who's the *yoneg*?" Tag as first-person narrator provides us readers the necessary context with this quick aside, showing some degree of cultural savvy: "*Yonega* is Cherokee for 'white'; when a modern-

day Cherokee says *yoneg*, the meaning isn't inherently derogatory, but it tends to work out that way" (41-2).

In fact, Tag even judges Chris's Cherokee credibility when Chris gives him "his best heroic-redman look, like a chubby edition of Wes Studi in *Geronimo*," issues the brave line "you think I'm afraid to die?", and launches into his warrior song, leading Tag to reflect to himself, "It didn't sound like any Cherokee song I'd ever heard; it sounded liked one of those things you hear Plains Indians singing at powwows" (44-5). Tommy reinforces Tag's estimation of Chris as a popular culture-derived image of an Indian rather than a real Cherokee; he slaps Chris, putting an end to the warrior chant, and chastises him for his behavior at a nuclear power plant protest, "making a spectacle of yourself—waving a god-damned tomahawk, for Christ's sake, like an extra in a John Wayne movie!" The tomahawk, confiscated and displayed on the wall of his home by the sheriff, would become the murder weapon that incriminates Chris. Chris tries to reply in Cherokee, but Tommy cuts him off with "Speak English, God damn it, your Cherokee is so bad it makes my teeth curl. You don't even speak your own language worth a damn . . . but you've picked up that whole Plains routine, haven't you?" (45). Tommy concludes the dressing down by wondering if Chris is not a blood relative but an adopted Osage, and Tag the narrator helpfully adds "calling a Cherokee an Osage generally comes under the category of attempted suicide" (46). Like Peter Bowen's Gabriel du Pré, who also judges a young Indian man's death song as contrived in *The Stick Game* (2000), Tag doesn't worry much about his own sense of identity even as he finds Chris lacking Cherokee bona fides, but the difference here is that the white Tag can silently observe this theater and supply the rest of the audience—at least the non-Cherokee part—useful annotation.

Blood Autumn not only contemplates Indian authenticity through this Cherokee generation and culture gap between Tommy and Chris. Tag, Rita, Tommy, and Lester also find a powwow at a local community building not so authentic. Tommy informs Tag “see, this powwow stuff isn’t really part of our tradition—our people picked it up from the Plains tribes in modern times—” but gets cut off: “For God’s sake, you guys,” Rita said. “Tag knows all that. We used to go to powwows around Tulsa all the time. Quit treating him like a tourist” (192). So we readers are also not supposed to regard Tag as a beginner with Cherokee culture. The quartet enjoy the high-spirited though “pretty bogus” (194) event, but this entertainment contrasts sharply to the next stop on the night’s itinerary, a meeting of the “Nighthawk Keetoowah Society,” about which Lester observes ““that powwow scene, it’s just something to do for laughs. This—’ He swept an arm in a gesture that included the fire, the dancers, the entire area. ‘This is who we are. This is where it lives. This is what’s real’” (196). Tag notes that Lester and Tommy are not their normal wisecracking selves in deference to the event. Lester feels a much stronger pull toward the traditions of his tribe than to the less genuine customs of the powwow borrowed from other Indian nations.

This tension between Cherokee self-determination and pan-Indian solidarity gets vividly illustrated when a group of outside agitators that has joined the nuclear plant protests draws Tag and Tommy’s ire. The group calls itself “the War Party,” and Tommy characterizes them as a “radical splinter group. . . . Broke off from the American Indian Movement—or got kicked out, depending on whose story you believe” (63). Tommy has heard that the War Party’s violent protest strategies led to the parting of ways with AIM, but also “persistent rumors” that the group’s leaders make money selling drugs. Tommy resents their Lakota leader subjecting him

and his fellow Cherokee to the same sort of dismissal Tommy had earlier given his nephew Chris:

“These Plains types like Marvin Painted Horse, they look down on us, tell each other that we’re not real Indians, because we don’t live on reservations and a lot of us have white blood and our ancestors took up some of the white man’s ways back in the last century. They don’t realize—or don’t want to admit—that we were fighting the whites for a couple of centuries before they even found out what a white man looked like.” (125)

Kirk Mitchell in *Cry Dance* (2000) offers a similar backstory for his admittedly more dangerous Indian activist villains, who have gone renegade (so to speak) from AIM’s control because of their radical methods, allowing that novel to divide its Indians into neat political camps: sincere fighters for justice, misled idealists turned terrorist, and cynical exploiters. But there are marked differences between Mitchell’s parable and Sanders’s presentation of his activists, whose interest may be split between advancing the cause of Indian justice, self-aggrandizement, and black market business.

While Mitchell’s sympathies lie with the representatives of U. S. government authority who must take out the rogue activists, Sanders’s treatment of the War Party offers greater nuance. Tommy and Tag are impatient with Marvin’s posturing and pious speechifying to the media about the plight of the Indian, but their main concern is that the War Party is interested in making Chris into a symbol rather than getting him cleared of murder charges, which does not diminish the legitimacy of Marvin’s critique in Tommy’s eyes. As Tommy clarifies, “Hey, Roper, you need to understand—most of that shit Marvin was laying out back there, I *agree* with him. Even if the son of a bitch is trying to get my cousin railroaded for his own purposes, he’s right more than he’s wrong” (71). Both *Cry Dance* and *Blood Autumn* criticize end-justifies-the-

means political action without directly taking on AIM and its agenda. Sanders adds a note of discomfort with pan-Indian solidarity, but he airs disagreements between Indians about goals and methods of achieving them. In *Cry Dance* Emmet Parker and Anna Turnipseed, the “good Indians” or “regulators” in Michael Ray Fitzgerald’s terms, swoop in to save their fellow Indians from these lawless elements, but in *Blood Autumn* no authorities strive for truth and justice: “two Indian cops” make only a cameo appearance escorting the handcuffed Chris Badwater to his grandfather’s funeral (177), Feds do not come to anybody’s rescue, and the ultra-corrupt officials of rural Sizemore County do all they can to thwart Tag (in their eyes another outside agitator from Tulsa) as he seeks to exonerate the innocent Badwater and identify the real killer. In *Blood Autumn* Sanders offers an entertaining and “generic” (as in genre rule-abiding) Mystery, but without proffering the comforting notion to readers that law enforcement is a fundamentally benign force in Indian country, as do Kirk Mitchell and many other non-Indian literary descendants of Hillerman, Garfield, and Stern.

PI Pair Complicates the Dialectic of Diversity

Nothing good comes through the white law enforcement establishment in *The Osage Rose* (2006) either. Tom Holm (Creek/Cherokee), an American Indian Studies professor at the University of Arizona, sets his mystery against the same 1920s Oklahoma oil boom backdrop as Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) did in her *Mean Spirit* (1991). While Hogan’s detective Stace Red Hawk is a minor character rather than that novel’s protagonist, Holm filters his tale more conventionally through a detective’s eyes, indeed, two sets of them. Holm offers dual detective protagonists, somewhat like Hillerman’s Navajo mysteries that pair tribal police officers Leaphorn and Chee. But his detectives are private eyes, and they are not both Indians: *The*

Osage Rose alternates points of view between the white ex-cop private investigator J. D. Daugherty and his young Cherokee assistant Hoolie Smith. These “teammates” seldom team up on the page. They operate not in tandem but in separate domains with little communication through most of the tale, J.D. navigating the racial and class topography of Tulsa and Hoolie (like William Sanders’s Tag Roper) facing corrupt white law enforcement in rural Hominy, Oklahoma. After J.D. dispatches Hoolie to Hominy, it’s not until page 216 of 245 that they reunite and briefly compare notes on the case before Hoolie returns to Hominy to settle unfinished business. This narrative design of one white and one Indian detective allows Holm to activate the Dialectic of Diversity by offering a sense that events are influenced by forces beyond the rational *and* deliver a satisfyingly-plotted whodunit that reveals rational answers, but also to push back against lazy distinctions between logical white people and otherworldly Indians.

Daugherty’s portion of the narrative resembles the hard-boiled exploits of a Jake Gittes of *Chinatown* movie fame as he searches for “the Osage Rose,” a wealthy white oilman’s daughter who has run off with the Indian Tommy Ruffle, and uncovers the secret of Rose Chichester’s parentage, reminiscent of the illicit liaison (minus the incest) at the heart of *Chinatown*. Similar to Sanders’s white detective Tag Roper, J.D. is privy to racist remarks that would probably pass for common sense in some 1920s circles. E.L. Chichester is concerned about containing news of what he fears is the elopement of his daughter with Tommy Ruffle:

“This mustn’t get out. It could cause a scandal. You see, the boy’s grandfather is extremely wealthy, but—how can I put it?”

J.D. finished Chichester’s thought, “Not good enough, eh?”

Chichester flushed but recovered quickly. “Don’t misunderstand me, Mr.

Daugherty. I am sympathetic to the Indians’ plight. The Shelbys are my closest friends.

Rose Shelby had done much for the Indian, and I've never hesitated to contribute to her activities on the Indian's behalf.

“My daughter is my only child and will inherit my estate. This boy, this Tommy Ruffle, like all members of his unhappy race, has no sense of the value of money. He is neither civilized nor cultured, and I cannot have our family name linked to someone one step removed from savagery.” (10-11)

J.D. works through his own unsettled reactions to such a union as Rose and Tommy's, first thinking how he “knew several successful Indian-white marriages, the offspring of which were upstanding, bright, and beautiful people,” but also understanding Chichester's worry: “Even J.D., like most men of his age and background, felt that darker men—like Italians and Latins—were far more lusty than whites, making it difficult for them to maintain a stable homelife. When J.D.'s sister had fallen in love with an Italian boy, his father had opposed the marriage based on that very reasoning. But J.D.'s mother, independent as always, favored the union because the Italian knew the catechism” (11). Despite that assurance that J.D. is indeed a product of his times, his detective work for the wealthy makes him perhaps more acutely aware than most of his contemporaries of social hierarchies: “In Chichester's world, marriage ‘beneath her station’ would be the same whether his daughter eloped with an Irish-Catholic like J.D., an Indian like the Ruffle kid, somebody from the wrong side of the tracks, or just some plain old working stiff” (12). So J.D. does relish making Chichester uncomfortable by revealing that “my best investigator is a Cherokee Indian,” as he spells out in interior monologue for the reader: “‘My fee isn't the only price he'll pay,’ thought J.D. ‘Chichester is going to have to deal with being a snob and a fool’” (12). Although Hoolie thinks his boss is too willing to sacrifice principles to expedite an investigation—“J.D. always tried to maintain very good relations with the various

sheriffs, cops, constables, marshals, and deputies he met. Hoolie believed that his boss overlooked their shortcomings and bad behavior to keep them out of J.D.'s business" (187-8)—the ex-cop Daugherty goes well beyond pragmatic self-interest in trying to protect the Shelbys' black maid Winnie Whitwell and her child from a white mob. In a counterpoint to the Rose/Tommy romance, Winnie's child was fathered by William, the scion of the Shelby family *and* the half-sibling of Rose Chichester (unbeknownst to either William or Rose before Rose's disappearance).

In untangling this knot of wealth and power, family secrets, murder, and the swindling of Osage oil heirs, there is something of the expected contrast between J.D.'s no-nonsense "just the facts, ma'am" approach to the case and a touch of the supernatural in Hoolie's pursuit of the truth. But Holm complicates the picture through J.D.'s understanding of his own ethnicity. He is not some generic white intellect, as he explains to Rose Shelby:

"Often in the detective business we use our intuition—"

Looking somewhat distracted, Mrs. Shelby interrupted, "According to Conan-Doyle, Sherlock Holmes relies on cold calculation and logic rather than intuition."

J.D. nodded and replied quietly, "I'm not Sherlock Holmes, ma'am. And he's a product of the imagination. I take everything into consideration, even my intuition. And I have a strong Irish feeling about the body in the morgue." (69)

The novel reminds us that even before Indians served that role there was a long procession of Others, like the Irish, who could be usefully contrasted to a dominant culture's sense of itself as reasoning, sober, grounded in reality, etc.

Still, Hoolie's portions of the whodunit *do* play in a different key, as his investigation involves supernatural visions. En route from Tulsa to Hominy, Hoolie conducts a sweat and gets

advice from spirit animals as he prepares for the upcoming campaign against the forces of corruption:

Hoolie sat as still as possible, looking in the darkness for anything that would tell him that his prayers had been heard. He saw two glowing eyes in the rock pit. They blinked once, and Hoolie felt a bit of air against his chest, as if something were breathing on him. Hoolie knew that the peregrine—the far-seeing bird of Cherokee warfare—would be there to help him see at great distances. “The Great Thunder will cast his Blue side toward the enemy. Look to the water for help.”

Hoolie then heard a fluttering sound, and he knew that the bat was close by. Its tiny voice came into his ears. “I will help. My time is the night, and you’ll need to know the darkness to find the lost girl. Look to the water for help.” (41)

This veteran of “The Great War” recalls how the peregrine, a Cherokee war symbol, had come to his aid in France. He also flashes back to a teenaged encounter with “sgili,” or witches, affirming that “Sgili exist. Of that, Hoolie had no doubt” (112), and opines of the murderer of his Osage host, “Whoever shot Ben was more than an assassin. He was a conjuror of malevolent medicine” (111). Before the final showdown with Rose’s captors, a panther in a dream tells him to hunt alone (219).

But Hoolie is not just a bearer of Cherokee tradition. As an Army veteran with experience working on military vehicles, when he’s not investigating for J.D. he pursues that most modern of early twentieth-century occupations, auto mechanic. In Sherlock Holmes (and auto mechanic) fashion, he implicates a murder suspect by reading tire tracks and footprints (202). Yet despite such ratiocination, Hoolie carries on a little of the internal debate over his role as crime-solver so familiar to readers of Hillerman with his conflicted tribal cop/Navajo singer

Jim Chee. Hoolie worries about how to square his investigative digging up of dirt with “the emphasis Cherokees placed on harmony and consensus within the clan and household” (17), and he despairs that the white world is indifferent to such ideals: “Maybe J.D. was right. Maybe he knew that you couldn’t restore harmony to white people or even fine-tune them, like you could an automobile. They seemed to like disorder. They thought it was natural to live in a world of crime, runaway wives, insanity, poverty, and hatred” (18). Hoolie looks askance at this chaotic white world his job forces him to investigate, but he also feels he’s drifted too far from his Cherokee upbringing.

Upon returning from the war, Hoolie approaches his home at night: “The dogs barked, and his father appeared at the door in the moonlight. He called out ‘Who’s there?’ in Cherokee twice before Hoolie could adjust to the sound of the language well enough to reply. After more than two years of speaking and thinking in English, he realized he would have to practice his first language just to get the sounds right again” (38). Though he and his new Osage friend John Tall Soldier prepare for battle in traditional fashion—John explains of the ceremony that “All this . . . is Heyluska stuff. *Heyluska* stands for warrior, war dance, war medicine, and warrior ways. It takes in a lot of things. We’re gonna sweat, and my grandpa is gonna call on the spirits to help us in the battle we’re gonna fight. He’s gonna sing some songs for our safe journey, too” (184-5)—Hoolie laments that he’s lost some of the power conferred by the old ways: “since the Cherokees were committed to the White Path of peace now, many felt that the war medicine should be put away for good. Hoolie didn’t agree, but because he didn’t know the sacred incantations for that particular power [“making himself appear in one place while he was really in another”], there was nothing he could do” (222). Hoolie helpfully sums up his internal struggle between intellect and magic: “His own upbringing had made him aware of the

occurrence of mysteries and that he should treat medicine with reverence and awe. He had himself experienced a number of truly extraordinary and otherworldly events. Sometimes though, his penchant for mechanics and practical problem solving led to his questioning his own beliefs. He was torn now” (78). In this passage, “mysteries” means something quite different than its customary usage in a detective novel: phenomena to be wondered at, not problems to solve or cases to crack.

Hoolie finds a way, however, to preserve those questioned beliefs *and* do his job, for the passage continues “he was torn now, because that very morning a snapping turtle had somehow communicated to Hoolie that he would act the warrior at some point during this case” (78). The previous year an elder, upon learning that Hoolie was a wounded veteran, “led him around the dance grounds, speaking Osage in a loud, high-pitched voice. One of Hoolie’s friends told him later that the elder was making a speech about how honored they were to have brave warriors; brave warriors were back among them once again” (37). Hoolie hopes to earn such honor in his new role as well: “Hoolie felt that, as a detective, it was his duty to protect people from evil and danger. Detectives should be like the old-time scouts; they should be able to find the enemy before he finds the people” (106). Ben Lookout reveals that a turtle had also told his mother that Hoolie was on the way, and remarks, “I don’t know how your people take these kinds of signs, but Osages take ’em serious. Now, my mother says that you’re a warrior, and we take that serious, too. So, you can stay here all you want, and we’ll help you find Tommy and this girl you’re lookin’ for” (78). Hoolie shows his mettle when he battles Ben’s murderers: “Deep down he knew why Grandma Lookout cared for him like she would a favored child. He had been there when Ben was killed and had taken up a weapon to fight off an enemy. Despite being a stranger, he had acted like a warrior. His relationship with Grandma Lookout had altered in that exchange

of gunfire. Once a recipient of Osage hospitality, Hoolie had been transformed into an honored defender of the Osage family. He had become a true warrior” (110-1). John Tall Soldier is excited that he will also finally get an opportunity to prove himself as a warrior:

“I still thought I could be a warrior, but the time never came ’round. I asked my grandpa if I could be a warrior if I talked against the white man for takin’ our land. He said that facing real warriors in battle was the only way. So, for years, I’ve been lookin’ for signs on what to do. I think this is it. We’re gonna go and return a woman who has been captured by the enemy. It’s gonna be a great thing.” (186)

When he avenges Ben’s murder, Hoolie updates a warrior tradition and gets the ultimate validation from Grandma Lookout: “Hoolie Smith, you took the badge and the watch because you didn’t want to take scalps. When I was a girl, the warriors only took the scalps of brave enemies. The men you fought were cowards who shot from far away. It was right not to take their hair. You’re a brave man. If you married my granddaughter, I’d be happy” (242). The novel’s final chapter ends with this promise that Hoolie has earned his place in this Indian community.

J.D. Daugherty suffers through no existential doubts over his authentic Irishness, but *The Osage Rose* does draw some other surprising parallels between its twin protagonists. J.D. also has the warrior label bestowed on him by an elder, Tommy Ruffle’s grandfather: “Chief Ruffle spoke in Osage. Potter listened carefully until the chief finished. Then he said, ‘The chief adds his thanks to mine and wishes to say that in the old days, a warrior who had brought back the body of a comrade killed in battle was highly honored. He wants to say that you have done the work of a warrior and will no doubt be honored in your old age’” (130). While lying beaten and unconscious after trying to protect Minnie from a white mob, J.D. has this culturally-appropriate

warrior vision: “*He was the warrior-prince Cuchulain. . . . When the enemy charged, Cuchulain fought as never before, and his enemies lay in heaps about his feet*” (174, italics in original).

Although we never learn whether J.D. considers this vision more than a mere dream, and although this warrior theme is only sketched in compared to Hoolie’s carefully developed warrior journey, it is refreshing to be reminded that other people besides Indians have a tribal past—or present.

Hoolie and J.D. also both skirt official law to dispense justice. Rather than turning over Ben Lookout’s murderers to the law, Hoolie kills them and provides this justification: “‘I talked things over with my relatives and a medicine man. They told me I did the right thing.’ He took a deep breath, expelled it, and said, ‘I hunted those two down. I killed Pete and the sheriff. I don’t care what the white man says. It was justice.’ He looked directly at Grandma Lookout. ‘They killed your son’” (241). And in an “Epilogue” set in 1956, Hoolie reads the newspaper headline “FORMER PRIVATE EYE CONFESSES TO MURDER” and we learn that the warrior J.D. has systematically enacted his revenge upon the men who killed Minnie Whitwell and will be defended by a law firm whose partners include one “Whitwell,” presumably Minnie and William Shelby’s son (244-5). Along with the gripping portrayal of the era’s oil boom politics and racial discord, the novel offers both the satisfying closure of a mystery solved and the exotic appeal of an Indian supernatural. The case requires the contributions of both the pragmatic J. D. and the supernaturally receptive Hoolie, and the novel nicely complicates this surface distinction between their worldviews.

McCurtain's Calling

Louis Owens's (Choctaw, Cherokee) two forays into whodunit territory are more subversive toward the genre. *The Sharpest Sight* (1992) offers murders and answers but spends more time than the usual mystery novel contemplating justice in the broadest sweep of history rather than concentrating almost exclusively on the "case" at hand. For example, there's a good deal of reflecting on two rounds of dispossession, first of the indigenous California peoples by the Spanish colonials, then of the Spanish settlers' descendants by the whites, as well as a nod toward environmental justice when an Indian elder remarks that because of a dam a river now only flows at flood so eventually the fish that keep making the pilgrimage upstream only to be stranded will die out and the circle is broken.

As in Holm's novel, the point of view alternates between multiple protagonists, though only one of the three is a detective, Sheriff Mundo Morales, and his attempt to pursue justice for the dead shares the spotlight with Cole McCurtain and his Uncle Luther, who care more for shaping the story going forward than for retracing a plot. Indeed, Luther and his wife Onatima worry more about recovering their nephew's bones so his shadow can complete its journey than about solving the mystery of his murder. While detective novels usually either explain away the supernatural by their conclusion or leave it suspended in the uncanny realm between prosaic reality and unabashed magic, the otherworldly here is not so *other*—Mundo and his dead grandfather carry on conversations, a black panther visits Luther and Onatima's shack in Mississippi and prompts the visiting Cole to have visions of his dead brother, and we realize at the novel's end that the apartment in which two elderly sisters have entertained Mundo several times has been deserted for years. One reviewer links these elements to Magic Realism, and deems them more important than the murder investigation plot: "As in the fictional terrains of

Garcia Marquez, the mythic and fantastic animate the town; spirits of the dead and nature watch over the living (sometimes even offering advice), and these forces, rather than the mystery's solution, redeem the townspeople" ("The Sharpest Sight"). *Bone Game* (1994) revisits the McCurtain family and once again blends historical sweep and fantastical elements, but in this outing set years later, Cole is an academic trying to find his footing while a serial killer terrorizes a California campus. While this novel centers on Cole the way a traditional detective story allows readers to follow the sleuth as he/she tracks the killer, Cole is certainly not a detective taking deliberate steps to solve a mystery. With these two novels, Owens takes the ingredients of a successful mystery—murder, suspense, a touch of the supernatural, criminals revealed—but alters the recipe to produce very different experiences than what a fan of conventional Indian detective novels would expect.

Breaking Up the Boys' Club

Stand-alone detective novels like *The Osage Rose* may invest a lot of energy in character development, as Holm does in fleshing out the back stories of his two leads. Holm has finally revisited these characters in 2015's *Anadarko: A Kiowa Country Mystery*, but the detective's character becomes even more crucial if he or she must sustain readers' interest from one novel to the next in a series with more frequent installments. As is the case with many of these detective novel series, for example, the pleasure of reading William Sanders's novels comes as much from hanging out with and being entertained by Tag Roper as from solving the mystery. Writers (again, mostly non-Indian) have offered detective leads from a variety of Native backgrounds to capture the public's interest, with Manly Wade Wellman even making up a tribe for his David Return character, but those writers never did vary another fundamental aspect of identity.

Whether the Indian detective characters appeared as a one-off or in a series of short stories, novels, or television programs, they all had at least one thing in common besides indigeneity until the last decade of the twentieth century. Searching for literary, movie, and television Indian detectives in the century plus since Phil Scott's 1882 dime novel adventure, we have no *female* Indian sleuths prior to the 1990s, when a fair number finally begin to join their male counterparts. And for the first time after more than a century of Native investigators created by men, women writers, both Indian and non-Indian, publish Indian Detective novels.

In the previous chapter, I discussed some of these female detectives created by non-Indians. Jean Hager (Cherokee) followed up her successful Mitch Bushyhead series with four Molly Bearpaw mysteries beginning with 1992's *Ravenmocker*. Dana Stabenow's Kate Shugak is probably the best-known indigenous woman solving crimes in paperbacks. The prolific Aimée and David Thurlo kept their Ella Clah saga running for 17 installments between *Blackening Song* (1995) and *Ghost Medicine* (2013) until Aimeé passed away in 2014. Margaret Coel partners Arapaho lawyer Vicki Holden with the Catholic priest Father John O'Malley in her series set on the Wind River Reservation. Mark T. Sullivan sends Micmac Diana Jackman into the killing woods in *The Purification Ceremony* (1997). Thomas Perry's protagonist Jane Whitefield, a Seneca, debuted in 1996's *Vanishing Act*. Perry puts an interesting spin on the character. Instead of the expected cop or PI, Whitefield conducts people to safety; the mysteries get solved as she performs her specialized function. And she's still in the guide business—helping people in trouble disappear—as of the 2014 installment *A String of Beads*. A Quinnault sister and brother are both police officers and secondary characters in Naomi Stokes's (Cherokee) *The Tree People* (1995), though her follow-up *The Listening Ones* (1997) makes the sister Jordan Tidewater its protagonist. David Cole launched the Laura Winslow series with *Butterfly Lost*

(1999) and has published seven installments. The part-Hopi Winslow uses her computer hacker skills to do cyber jobs for clients. Tough guy Emmet Quannah Parker, half-Comanche, gets half-Modoc FBI rookie Anna Turnipseed as a partner in *Cry Dance* (2000). J. F. Trainor with *Target for Murder* (1993) and S.D. Tooley with *When the Dead Speak* (1999) launched series with female Indian protagonists not so authentically-grounded in their purported cultures. Mardi Medawar (Cherokee) wrote one mystery featuring modern Ojibwe potter Karen “Tracker” Charbonneau set around Wisconsin’s Red Cliff Reservation, *Murder on the Red Cliff Rez* (2002) to go along with her three historical mysteries starring the male Kiowa healer Tay-Bodal. And finally in 2001, after solving murders since 1977’s *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, Marcia Muller’s popular PI Sharon McCone discovers she has Modoc ancestry in *Listen to the Silence*.

Like male Indian characters solving literary crimes, most of these female Native American investigators have been dreamed up by non-Indians. Even some Indian writers are reaching across cultural boundaries to tell these stories of indigenous women. It is not clear how closely Jean Hager, variously listed as 1/8 or 1/16 Cherokee, identifies with or participates in Cherokee culture even though she was born in Pawnee, Oklahoma. Perhaps her chief affiliation is with the Mystery genre itself, as she’s published the guidebook *How to Write and Market Your Mystery Novel* (1998) and promotes the Tess Darcy “cozy” series along with her Mitch Bushyhead and Molly Bearpaw titles. It is no crime, so to speak, for an Indian to write about whomever and whatever she pleases, but Hager seems to approach Cherokee culture as someone looking for a good story to tell rather than as someone who wants to tell a particular story about Cherokees. Naomi Stokes, who identifies herself as “part Cherokee,” is reaching further afield culturally in *The Tree People* (1995) with its white and Quinnault characters facing a murderer on the Olympic Peninsula. And another Cherokee, Mardi Medawar, usually writes of the Kiowa

and Crow, but chooses an Ojibwe protagonist for *Murder on the Red Cliff Rez.* She does, however, know the terrain as a resident of the Red Cliff Reservation.

Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) sets *Mean Spirit* (1991) in Oklahoma where she spent much of her childhood, though like Medawar she writes about Indians from a different nation: *Mean Spirit* primarily chronicles Osages' struggles during the oil boom of the early 20th century. Since I discuss the novel extensively in an earlier chapter, here I mention it only briefly since it is such a great example of an Indian writer refusing the dictates of the Mystery genre. Her Indian detective is a male, and I have noted how Stace Red Hawk is but one minor character in a large cast rather than the narrative center of gravity we would expect in a Mystery. Reviewer Lee Lemon also remarks on how *Mean Spirit* succeeds by *not* settling into the detective novel's well-worn grooves: "All the elements of a highly charged crime thriller work; but instead of following the usual pattern of that overworked genre by focusing on the crime, the criminal, or the detective, she directs our attention to the victims. As we get to know the victims, we better understand the values that are both their strength and their weakness." Dangerous action propels *Mean Spirit* forward, but the novel spotlights crime's effects and people's responses to it rather than its detection.

The First (and So Far Maybe Only) Lesbian Indian Detective

Some of the Indian writers working the genre push the balance even further away from the crime-solving plotline and toward the crime-solver's characterization. Ojibwe Carole laFavor's two Mystery novels understandably put the emphasis on her protagonist's personal life even while the plots offer powerful messages of social justice. In fact, as the old slogan of second wave feminism puts it, in these novels the personal is political since laFavor's detective

Renee LaRoche is such a literary trailblazer. As an Ojibwe activist, Carole laFavor is culturally much closer to her literary creation Renee than any of these other writers to theirs. That resemblance is no guarantee of great literature, of course; one could write an awful novel from such an insider's perspective. But it should make us curious to see, to the best of our ability if we do not share that culture, whether and how the results are shaped by that insider knowledge. And laFavor's two mysteries differ from more standard whodunit fare.

First, laFavor's sense of self is just as much derived from her sexual orientation as her tribal affiliation (which could as well be true for a straight writer, though the dominant culture's norms do not require brave stands for heterosexuality). laFavor identifies as a "Two Spirit Ojibwe," served on the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS from 1995-97, and helped found the Indian AIDS support organization "Positively Native." Indeed, when I attended her book release in the mid-1990s at Amazon bookstore in Minneapolis (a proudly lesbian bookstore, whose name was purchased by some fledging online bookstore no one has heard of since), I may have been the only male in a decent-sized audience. laFavor seemed surprised to see me but was gracious in signing my copy of her book. laFavor's Ojibwe protagonist is also lesbian, and Renee's personal life eclipses the crime plots in *Along the Journey River* (1996) and *Evil Dead Center* (1998).

In *Along the Journey River*, Renee's struggles recovering from addiction, her stormy relationship with a white woman, her sparring with a difficult teenage daughter, and her attempts to help a fellow Ojibwe find himself do not leave a lot of room for discovering clues and following leads. The first Renee LaRoche novel offers a crime plot involving stolen Ojibwe artifacts. Such thievery is an important real-world issue, and that theme has been common in the subgenre; Hillerman's Leaphorn and Chee and their Indian detective peers kept busy tracking

such stolen goods and the murders they provoke. But in *Evil Dead Center*, Renee encounters crimes that grow (imaginatively, at least) more directly from laFavor's experiences as a nurse and Indian activist. The police are quick to write off a dead Indian woman as a suicide, but Renee and her ex-lover Caroline "Cal" Beltrain, an AIM member, work much harder to find the truth, and thus discover a child pornography ring involving Indian kids in white foster homes.

The murder of this woman and the exploitation of these children underscore not only their personal vulnerabilities but also the community's. By extending the term sovereignty beyond its usual corporate or group meanings, Sarah Deer helps us understand the shared underpinnings of such violation of individuals and colonial oppression: "I use the term *sovereignty* in two senses, referring to both political sovereignty and personal sovereignty. I conceive of sovereignty as a description of self-determination" (xv). *Evil Dead Center's* non-Indian perpetrators deny self-determination about as brutally as possible: they murder an indigenous woman and sexually abuse Native children. The ways those criminals prey on Indians offer extreme examples of a more general disregard for Ojibwe self-determination among many non-Indians in Renee's Northern Minnesota. But other parties also contribute to the assault on sovereignty. The adoption system favors placing Indian children with white couples, and the non-tribal police whose jurisdiction overrides tribal sovereignty put less effort into investigating a woman's death *because* she was an Indian.

laFavor's novels share their focus on individual self-determination with several other mysteries written by Indian women about female Indian detectives, which I will discuss below, such as Frances Washburn's and Marcie Rendon's coming-of-age tales and Sara Sue Hoklotubbe's and Devon Abbott Mihesuah's stories about middle-aged women facing career obstacles. Though Mihesuah's protagonist, a college professor, reflects and acts on indigenous

sovereignty at the group level as well as making her way through an actively hostile academic world, laFavor's Renee, of these five Native investigators, best embodies the lived connection between individual and group self-determination.

As a queer character, Renee also brings a refreshing new engagement with gender and identity to the subgenre, especially through her quest for self-determination at both personal and communal levels. Joanne Barker draws parallels between forces that seek to erase Indianness and those that seek to erase queerness, both suppressions of individual and group self-determination. She invokes sovereignty in expressions of gender identity and national identity, and urges critical sovereignty in responses to the "imperial-colonial work of those modes of Indigeneity that operationalize genocide and dispossession by ideologically and discursively vacating the Indigenous from the Indigenous" and to "the liberal work of those theoretical modes of analysis and the political movements from which they emerge that seek to translate Indigenous peoples into normative gendered and sexed citizens of the state" (7). Jodi Byrd also cautions against the damage of such translations, for example, trading away self-determination for the false rewards of citizenship in the colonial state. She argues that from the colonial state's perspective, indigeneity operates similarly to race. To the state and its defenders and collaborators, indigeneity, like race, is merely a form of diversity to be managed as the state solidifies and expands its boundaries, an instance of "vacating the Indigenous from the Indigenous," as Barker says. Byrd sardonically notes the colonial state's desired outcome of this maneuver: "indigeneity collapses into race and is then supposedly remediated through a racial liberalism that offers incorporation into the imperial nation as the fulfillment of humanity's struggle against oppression" (211). Renee, by contrast, claims sovereignty for herself and her people; she needs no outside affirmations of her love life, and her two mysteries show that on her

watch Indians will take care of their own problems rather than wait for the beneficence of the federal, state, or surrounding local governments.

With all her personal and tribal relationships so prominently featured, Renee is not the star of taut Philip Marlowe-style mysteries where the detectives derive their identity primarily from their vocation, have no discernible life outside the job, and offer just enough biography to bring readers closer without impeding the plot. With Renee, it's probably the other way around: her life defines her work. Lisa Tatonelli argues that Renee's detection *grows out* of her gender and tribal identity. When sixteen-year-old Renee speaks of her sexual feelings to her grandmother, Gram goes beyond mere acceptance to celebration; Tatonelli observes, "There is no closet from which to emerge in laFavor's characterization of Renee's experience—no scene of disclosure in which the queer subject's secrets are revealed" (378). But Gram also charges Renee with special duties. As Tatonelli characterizes the exchange, "According to Renee's Gram, alternate gender roles have 'always' been a part of Anishinaabe society. Likewise, the conversation offers a particular responsibility to Two-Spirits; by inhabiting 'the space between,' Renee must serve as a guide, which her informal position as detective enables her to do" (378). Fans of conventional mysteries may expect plots more focused on whodunit, but Tatonelli offers a reasonable explanation for why laFavor's novels spotlight the group rather than the detective's moves as an individual quest for the truth: "Renee's embrace of a specifically Two-Spirit erotics anchors her to family and brings her tribal community a powerful healing when she employs her skills to protect her people from instances of racism, abuse, and injustice" (375). Other mystery writers have taken on painful subjects like child pornography, but the abused or dead bodies of the vulnerable are most often an occasion for the hero to be heroic rather than the call for community health that we hear in *Evil Dead Center*.

Checks on Sadie

Sara Sue Hoklotubbe is another female Indian writer with an Indian heroine shaped through autobiography. The “About the Author” blurb from *Deception on All Accounts* (2003) announces her cultural and geographical credibility to write about this character Sadie Walela in this particular setting:

Sara Sue Hoklotubbe (Cherokee) was born and raised in northeastern Oklahoma near the banks of Lake Eucha in Rattlesnake Hollow. . . . After living in other parts of Oklahoma, Hawaii, and Alaska, she recently returned to the heart of the Cherokee Nation. There, she lives with her Choctaw husband, reconnecting with the peaceful surroundings of her youth while she continues to write.

Hoklotubbe’s protagonist is, according to the cover, “a blue-eyed Cherokee living in northeastern Oklahoma, a half-blood who finds she sometimes has to adapt to get by in the white man's world, much as her father's ancestors did.” Sadie Walela, as an indigenous female, bumps against a double-paned glass ceiling in the banking business; she is still low-level management after twelve years, while a white guy hired the same day has climbed the good-old-boy ranks. Sadie does get promoted during the course of the novel to the downtown office as Security Manager, but her corporate ascent is short-lived. She is fired in a symbolic purge when robberies alarm clients and shareholders, so she must scramble to make a living, first as an overnight cashier at a grocery store and then as the bookkeeper for a general store.

At the start of the tale, one of those bank robberies leaves a young coworker murdered, and Sadie turns amateur sleuth. She is *not* a detective in the familiar whodunit sense. While Sadie feels grief and self-imposed guilt over the murdered colleague (she tells herself she could have arrived at work earlier that day), she does not resolve to find the killer until page 128 out of

210, after she's been fired from the Security Manager job. And rather than taking thoughtful steps to identify the bank robber and thus solve the murder in the expected manner of all sleuths professional or amateur, the only thing Sadie does to advance the case is help needy people, a sick little girl and a mute homeless man. Sadie brings the girl to visit the homeless man in a mental hospital, and since the girl reminds him of his own deceased child whose death drove him onto the streets and stole his voice, the heretofore mute witness to the crime begins to talk. It is good karma crime-busting: do good deeds, and the answers will materialize.

The novel is much more interested in Sadie's personal and professional life than in this perfunctory whodunit plot. Besides her good Samaritan work with the sick child and silent homeless man and her efforts to make a living if not build a career, Sadie is kept busy with an abusive ex-husband just released from prison who wants back into her life, as well as exploring a budding new love interest and receiving the attentions of two other Indian men. In fact, the novel focuses so intently on Sadie's relationships and professional journey that a potential clue, a camera dropped by her new boyfriend, gets lost in the woods and never again mentioned, despite the fact that Sadie's new beau turns out to be the robber/murderer. The novel is subtitled "A Sadie Walela Mystery" even though the case is resolved rather than solved and Sadie does not do much sleuthing to justify that subtitle.

The nod to the Mystery by *Deception on All Accounts'* subtitle and plot shows the marketing power of the genre even as the novel primarily offers other rewards than a crime investigation successfully concluded. It makes pointed observations about white people, calling their money lust "green frog disease" (210), and holds up boorish white characters for our scorn. It teaches some regional history. The novel emphasizes the idea that Sadie is connected to her family and knowledgeable about her ancestral land. And it even provides Sadie a giant wolf-dog

protector like the one Dana Stabenow gives her Alaskan investigator Kate Shugak, so dog-loving readers are pleased. Like Carole laFavor's novels, Hoklotubbe's use the genre to deliver other goods besides that unraveled puzzle that mystery readers demand; both dramatize their protagonists' struggles to discover or create their roles—as women, as Indians, as romantic/sexual beings, and as professionals. Sadie's sense of the Indian component of her identity extends mostly to family and the patch of ground she's proud to call home rather than to a more communal and even pan-Indian outlook like Renee's. Perhaps we can attribute that difference to the more assimilated context for Sadie's Cherokee life versus the choice Renee makes to leave multicultural Minneapolis and return to her home Anishinaabe reservation to become once again whole after a struggle with addiction. But aside from this difference in how they understand their Indianness, as well as in the gender of their romantic partners, Renee LaRoche and Sadie Walela are both caretakers; their concern about the welfare of others goes beyond that of the usual run of private eyes, from the hard-boiled cynics to even most of the idealistic justice-seekers.

An Involuntary Investigator

Like Sadie Walela, Sissy Roberts of Frances Washburn's (Lakota/Anishinaabe) *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band* (2014) knows the meaning of working hard for a dollar: the young Lakota woman puts in long hours waitressing at a diner and on weekends sings and picks guitar for the eponymous Country and Western outfit (the title also perhaps makes a pun in this Indian context on the word "band"). Unlike the older and world-weary Renee LaRoche returning to her reservation, however, Sissy dreams of leaving the Pine Ridge Reservation. Like both laFavor's Two Spirit detective and Hoklotubbe's Cherokee banker (Hoklotubbe worked in

the banking business for 21 years), Sissy hews fairly closely to her creator's life story— Washburn also grew up at Pine Ridge, and an *Arizona Daily Star* review proclaims that “of her four books (three novels and one biography), this is the most autobiographical, drawing on her own yearning for a too-expensive college education and a post-high school life with a band” (Willette). Like Hoklotubbe and laFavor, Washburn is uninterested in crafting a conventional mystery, though the criminal investigation does not seem so much like an obligatory exercise to get readers to sit still and share the heroine's struggles. Still, *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band* is ultimately more subversive toward the genre than Hoklotubbe's and LaFavor's detective novels.

The body of Buffalo Ames shows up early on to propel the narrative forward in whodunit fashion, but *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band* does not play by the mystery contract rules—the reader is not given enough info to see the solution. Sissy does not “investigate.” People tell her stuff (the tendency for people to make her their confidante is humorously portrayed as her special burden in life), and then she gets hit in the head by a line drive at a baseball game, has an interior monologue with her id or something, and begins to see what happened, as well as how she can move forward with her life and attend college. The “murder” (it turns out to be accidental) lurks behind the scenes as various more interesting plots play out. The figure who would lie at the center of most murder mysteries is here relegated to the margins, both by the text itself and, within the novel's world, by the community at Pine Ridge. FBI agent Tom Holm is a Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma who complains to Sissy that his superiors sent him to Pine Ridge because they assumed as an Indian he'd have special access that would aid his investigation, yet nobody will even talk to him. If his name sounds familiar, that's because he must be named for Washburn's mentor at Arizona's American Indian Studies department, the

author of the previously discussed *The Osage Rose*. The joke isn't too far inside since "Tom Holm" writes a blurb on the back cover.

The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band is set in 1969, the same year, as Margaret Noodin notes, that Vine Deloria, Jr. published *Custer Died for your Sins* and N. Scott Momaday won his Pulitzer Prize, and the time when "Red Power" signs emerge at Pine Ridge, as depicted at the end of the novel ("Review"). It is also, of course, the time Hillerman is writing his first Navajo mystery. The contrast with the Hillerman template of Indian mystery is striking. Leaphorn and Chee encounter suspicion toward law enforcement in their investigations, and even if we readers are encouraged to understand such attitudes, that resistance is ultimately an impediment to justice that delays our satisfying discovery of the culprit. Sometimes in Hillerman's novels, those bad guys turn out to be bad cops, but it is still the police who expose police corruption. In Washburn's novel, Sissy also does not want to cooperate with law enforcement as embodied by the FBI outsider Holm, nor does anyone else on the reservation, through a mixture of distrust and of fear that they will be targeted for reprisal if seen aiding Holm's efforts. Holm is portrayed as a decent enough guy reluctantly trying to do his job, but we are never encouraged to identify with him or anguish over the roadblocks to his investigation. Indeed, we only feel anxiety for Sissy as he approaches her several times for help. Frozen out by Sissy and her neighbors, the Indian FBI agent is peripheral to the action.

Contrary to the Hillerman mode, in Washburn's novel we do not follow either a lawman or a law woman through a police procedural or a private or amateur investigator sniffing clues and seeking the truth. Sissy arrives at the truth in a decidedly non-detecting way, and the novel handles that truth differently from the standard mystery's revelation scene; we find out that Sissy's friend shoved Buffalo, who fell, hit his head on a rock, and died, but Sissy will never

share that fact with Tom Holm or anyone else. Reading back in history from our vantage point, we know how spectacularly any possible good will between Pine Ridge residents and the FBI would die in just a few years hence, but it is not just the distrusted Fed who is ineffectual in finding Buffalo Ames's killer. No tribal cops are swooping in to seek the truth either; Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee have no equivalents in this novel. The story is not *about* detectives. After an entire novel of bodiless third-person narration, an epilogue shifts into Sissy speaking in first person from far ahead in her college-educated future. We find she quit the band and began her studies at the University of Nebraska-Kearney. The shift implies that Sissy has finally found her voice, I suppose, and *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band* is her tale of personal discovery much more than the story of Buffalo Ames's demise.

Minnesota Flats

Marcie Rendon (Anishinaabe) has crafted a similar protagonist for 2017's *Murder on the Red River*. Renee Blackbear goes by the moniker Cash she picks up as a field laborer in 1968 working the flat-as-a-pool-table expanse of the Red River Valley. Like Sissy Roberts, young Cash makes extra money in bars: she hustles overconfident farm boys at real pool tables. She also dreams of a life beyond lifting hay bales and shooting pool: "Her mind was always composing songs or stories. The long days in the field gave her plenty of time to think of things to write. If she ever found the time to put words to paper, that would be a different story. . . . Maybe with her next paycheck, she would get a guitar" (9). Cash does not need to get beamed by a baseball to have a vision; she has been having out of body experiences since childhood: "One day in the middle of a daydream, she floated out of her body and into the yard where her foster

mother was hanging men's work jeans on the line. Freaked out, she thudded back into her body on the chair, wondering what the heck just happened" (40).

In addition to recounting these occasional supernatural experiences, the novel spends many pages sketching Cash's environs and filling in the rest of her back story before we get to the murder scene. Through a series of placements with white foster families, police officer and now Sheriff Wheaton (we are never told his first name) has watched over Cash: "She didn't know why Wheaton looked out for her. Didn't ask. It worked for both of them" (29). When Cash hears on the radio that Sheriff Wheaton is investigating "a body that was found in a stubble-field thirty miles north of the FM [Fargo-Moorhead] area off Highway 75" (25), she goes to the crime scene. Apparently, Cash and Wheaton have an intuitive link. When Wheaton asks, "What brought you out this way this morning," Cash replies, "'You know how it is. Sometimes I just get a feeling and I follow it. . . . Now I see you were probably wanting me to come this way anyways.'" They both chuckled. It had happened many times before when Wheaton had thought Cash and she had shown up moments later. Or the other way around" (37-8).

After Cash and Wheaton reaffirm their psychic bond, Cash examines the victim and has a vision—"Soon she was lost in time, her body floating up and out of the truck bed and following the trail of a soul gone northeast to say good-bye to loved ones" (39)—that leads her to the dead man's family on the Red Lake Reservation. Visiting the county morgue later with Wheaton, Cash briefly holds a piece of evidence and has another vision that eventually enables her to crack the case: "Cash reached over and opened the Piggly Wiggly bag. A draft of sorrow climbed up out it and swirled around her. In that moment she saw a group of Indian men laughing, wearing field clothes, leaning back on their heels. Two white men were standing off at a tree line. Cash just made out the shadow of a rifle before the paper bag was yanked from her hands" (70). Soon

Cash overhears a group of white men at a bar talking suspiciously—“*Found him dead. Dead injun. Stabbed*” (78, italics in original)—finds the field from her vision, and spies on the men arguing: “‘Shit, I don’t know why you had to go stab him,’ said the drunk. ‘He already gave you his check’” (84). Rather than following a series of clues to the mystery’s solution, Cash discovers whodunit through her visions and such chance encounters.

Like *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band*, *Murder on the Red River* involves readers more in Cash’s coming-of-age story than in sharing clues and inviting them to match wits with Cash as she solves a puzzle. And like Sissy’s, Cash’s tale closes with her heading to college. Cash teases Wheaton with “I could just shoot pool for a living” and then reassures him: “‘I was just kidding,’ she said. I’ll go. I’ll go. Some hippie chick with an Indian boyfriend showed me how to fill out the paperwork and where the Indian students’ office is. So I just got to show up after the long weekend and start classes’” (190). And Cash does more than trade her itinerant existence in farm fields and bars for the promise of higher education. In the final scene, she decides not to spend the night with her married white lover Jim and instead leaves a bar with “Long Braids,” who is heading to Minneapolis to join the American Indian Movement (198). In ending her dalliance with Jim and choosing the politically engaged Indian, Cash presumably sets her course toward responsible adulthood.

Badgering Academic Bigots

If *Murder on the Red River* ends just as Cash takes her first tentative steps toward navigating college, and *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band* jumps over that phase of Sissy’s life to a distantly post-college vantage point for a final bit of first-person reflection, *Document of Expectations* (2011) by Devon Abbott Mihesuah (Choctaw) places one of its dual protagonists

neck-deep in the middle of her academic career. Roxanne Badger recalls her own wild days that resemble Cash and Sissy's roadhouse ramblings—"Roxanne fumbled through her youth, drinking, partying, driving around the rez way too fast in beat-up cars and trucks" (63)—but by the novel's present day, she has worked her way up to a tenure-track position in the "Central Highlands University" Anthropology Department. The novel's title spotlights her frustrations with her professional predicament; despite meeting and exceeding the ambitious teaching, committee work, and publishing goals on her yearly "Document of Expectations," she is repeatedly denied tenure. The novel's other heroine *might* mirror Roxanne's experience running into unfair career roadblocks in a field not necessarily welcoming to Indians or women, though we do not learn much about how Monique Blue Hawk has become "Chief Investigator of Moose City Homicide" (11). The novel spends much less space filling in Monique's back story or detailing her challenges than chronicling Roxanne's unfair treatment in academe. The detective character would normally occupy a whodunit's narrative center, but in *Document of Expectations*, Monique serves mainly to publicize Roxanne's plight to readers. In interviewing Anthropology faculty and staff, Monique records academic injustices on her way toward solving the ultimate instance of literal academic back-stabbing, the murder of Roxanne's colleague Tony Smoke Rise, another indigenous anthropologist who had endured harassment from and is eventually killed by the department's powerbrokers because he threatens to expose their plot to funnel Native remains and artifacts from a highway construction site onto the black market.

Roxanne Badger carries an understandable chip on her shoulder from contending with discrimination throughout her journey in higher education. Walking to the Anthropology building unaware that it has become a crime scene overnight, Roxanne recounts these slights for readers. Undergraduate Roxanne tangles with a Professor May, who blithely begins a lecture

with “the primitive, uncivilized cultures of the pre-contact Eastern Woodlands groups” before Roxanne interrupts to ask, “please define ‘primitive’ and ‘civilization’ and explain who created the definitions.” Roxanne’s challenge renders her classmates “silent and giddy with anticipation of an argument between the Colonialist Oppressor and Activist Indigene” (66). Her white graduate school classmates unleash ill-founded opinions on the supposedly preferential treatment accorded students like Roxanne: “All minorities get free rides.” “Yeah, and they don’t even have to apply.” “I know for a fact Indians are recruited into graduate programs because they help fill the minority quota. Their grade points are super low, but professors have to pass them to stay out of trouble with the administration” (66-7). Such attitudes take their toll on her: “Roxanne knew she was changing emotionally. She had grown defensive and slightly paranoid. How this new anger might serve her into the future she didn’t know. Her short fuse scared her” (68).

The climate is no better when Roxanne lands her tenure-track position at Central Highlands University. Department Secretary Mary explains to detective Monique and her partner Chuck Clark how colleagues sabotage Roxanne’s reputation with graduate students: “Some of those colleagues, like Belinda Rinds, tell students all sorts of bull about Rox and Tone [Tony Smoke Rise]. That they don’t know current theories, they’re essentialists, they can’t help students find jobs. Blah blah.” When Clark asks what she means by the term “essentialists,” Mary explains “that only Indians know about Indians and therefore only Indians should write about Indians. Neither one believes that. They’ve said so” (57). Roxanne and Tony’s fortunes contrast sharply with those of the third Indian in the Anthropology Department, Pauley Wenetae. Associate Chair Ross Clipper tells Monique and Clark that the other minority faculty besides the three Indians “quit years ago” because they “couldn’t take the pressure of having to be team

players. All of them were loners. Except Wenetae. He knows how to play ball around here” (45-6). And Mary the secretary fills in this portrait of the compliant Wenetae for the detectives:

He was hired at the same time as Rox and Tone, but he’s nothing like them. He speaks around campus at roundtables, seminars, and he always does the Indian Prayer at big functions. Pauley gets along well with the schemers in the department because he allows them to use him. Pauley’s never here. He takes a research trip at least once a month.

(58)

Monique and Clark note the physical signs of Pauley’s undeserved favored status:

“Dang,” said Clark. “Twice the size of Tony and Roxanne’s offices.”

“And half the books,” added Monique (50).

To escape the suffocating confines of the Anthropology Department, Roxanne and Tony had months earlier begun laying the groundwork and raising funds for their dream project, the Indigenous Studies Institute, which threatens to divert cash from Anthropology.

Roxanne did have two supportive white mentors in undergraduate and graduate school, and she receives condolences about the loss of Tony from several scholars: “These were his allies, who periodically called to check in, to find out the latest incredible events in the CHU anthropology department. All of these friends were white” (159). But the white faculty at Roxanne’s school are cartoonish stereotypes of incompetent, entitled, lazy, and greedy professors. They use their powerful positions in the department hierarchy to angle for Tuesday-Thursday teaching schedules with classes done early enough to make their golfing tee times. They meet secretly at a bar to decide which one of them will be next in line for department chair. They gobble up travel funds for vacations disguised as field research. The unfortunately-named chair Mark Fhardt “had only written one slim monograph; actually he had co-authored it and on

the shelf it looked like a child's Little Golden Book." When Fhardt defensively informs Monique, "Uh, I wrote a book called *Pot Shards in Ruin #24 at Hawikah*," she is unimpressed: "She didn't change expression. 'Sounds enlightening'" (40). Fhardt admits that Roxanne, by contrast, is "on her third or fourth book. She also has several dozen essays published" (42). Rhonda Cartwright surprises Monique with the claim "I used to be Indian. . . . In my former life. My former self was Iroquois." When Monique asks which tribe ("That's a group of tribes, not one tribe"), Rhonda replies "'You just don't get it.' She looked at her feet and held her purse tighter." And Monique thinks, "*How in hell did you get hired?* (138-9, italics in original). Ross Clipper has a card game open on his office computer and tells Monique, "lots of games on there" (45). I suppose these caricatures are payback for all the cardboard cutout Indians populating popular culture.

Document of Expectations provides elements of sleuthing. For example, the culprit falls while scaling the Anthropology Building's outer wall and leaves an imprint of "a substantial, wide ass" in the flower bed (30). Red dirt in Tony's office (130) eventually leads Monique to the dig at the highway construction site. The investigators commit one gaffe that ought to make readers slap their foreheads in disbelief. Though Monique warns Roxanne that "it appears that you were an intended victim. We traced the steps of the perp and he, or she, also went to your office and found your light on, but you weren't there" (106), the officers leave Roxanne unguarded so that she is attacked on a morning jog. Monique does not apologize for this oversight or even reflect on it. But the denouement is where the novel really parts company with the standard whodunit. Rather than a classic drawing room reveal, the novel gleefully details a karmic revenge fantasy. After a Hopi elder sings a song at Tony's funeral (162), the guilty parties begin dropping dead or offing themselves in improbable fashion. Ross Clipper collapses

in his pew of a heart attack (162). Jerry Langstrome and Frank Smithers run their car into the Anthropology Building and get crushed by a falling oak (164). Drunken Leo Harding is electrocuted when his portable television falls into his hot tub (166). Ben Rogers admits his guilt to his wife over dinner, refuses her entreaties to go to the police, and promptly chokes on his steak (187). The novel holds out both rational *and* supernatural explanations for these calamities. Monique's husband argues that "no one killed those men. They got hurt because they were careless. That's all." When Monique counters, "The way those people were hurt and died. . . . That couldn't be a coincidence," he disagrees: "Sure it could. . . . They're plenty of elders with power, but I don't believe any of the Indians killed the anthropologists" (190). Readers may draw their own conclusions.

Document of Expectations is a fictional companion piece to Mihesuah's polemic *So You Want to Write about American Indians?: A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars* (2005). Mihesuah takes an oblique swipe at Indian detective novels in its "Preface": "This is not a book that offers detailed instructions about grammar, plot development, or writing mysteries" (ix). She cautions prospective scribes not to get their hopes up for financial reward from writing on Native themes:

Unless you have found what it is that mainstream America wants to read about American Indians—such as non-Native mystery writer Tony Hillerman or Native writers Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie—or you are a popular New Age writer (these writers often make their money unscrupulously by claiming to be "Indian shamans"), you probably won't make much monetary profit from your work. (2)

Her observation about Hillerman's appeal dovetails nicely with my thesis that a good portion of America's readers like their fictional Indians wrapped in the whodunit's familiar contours.

Despite her misgivings about the Hillerman type of Indian novel (commercial success is *not* her yardstick for evaluating literature), Miheesuah's novel hits on those same crowd-pleasing elements, but makes a more scathing critique of systematic oppression than any of Hillerman's morality tales. Unlike mysteries that ratchet up suspense as an investigator races to unmask a killer, this novel takes its time furthering the whodunit plot. It is more devoted to making us feel the injustices Roxanne and Tony face and satirizing the brand of "scholarship" that treats Indians as objects of study. The novel outlines Roxanne and Tony's vision for their Indigenous Studies Institute:

Their proposed curriculum featured basic courses in policy, history, and economics, including strategies for decolonization in each. Roxanne approached the Department of English, whose faculty agreed that instead of American Indian Literature, a course that focused on identity confusion, place, and humor, the department would offer Literature as Activism, which might encourage critics to focus on stories with messages of empowerment. Faculty from across the disciplines were ready to teach part-time in the new ISI. (90-1)

Document of Expectations serves that call for message literature. Monique briefly recalls all the Indian suffering she had witnessed in her two previous assignments in Oklahoma and Phoenix, but quickly adds this corrective to the grim portrait of Indian Country that emerges from so many murder mysteries: "She knew plenty of Native women and men who were healthy, smart, and kind and who worked for the betterment of their cultures" (22).

Don't Trust the Force, Luke

It is tempting to invoke gender as a reason that these Indian women write mysteries in which the criminal investigation takes a backseat to the protagonists' life quests and to social activism, but plenty of female authors have written celebrated whodunits, and several Indian men have shared laFavor, Hoklotubbe, Washburn, and Mihesuah's relative indifference to that formula. For instance, Jim Northrup (Anishinaabe), whose *Dirty Copper* (2014) introduces and quickly resolves criminal episodes rather than sustaining a mystery. Luke Warmwater is a returned Vietnam vet trying to build a career in law enforcement. He starts with the county sheriff's department in his home in northern Minnesota. Here again, a Native American writer is not captivated by the whodunit formula. Most of the police incidents wrap up in a page or so. It seems like the novel is setting up two mysteries at the end when Luke must interview two murder suspects, a fellow Marine vet and a housewife. They both confess, short-circuiting the expected valiant quest to exonerate the wrongly accused. Luke feels compassion toward both murderers, which also bucks the genre's tendencies.

Dirty Copper follows Luke's struggles to work in law enforcement, illustrating better than most Indian detective fictions the predicaments Luke faces as a Native American on the police force. Many of his white colleagues are blatantly racist to his face and some are racist behind his back. At the same time, Luke endures scorn from some of the fellow Anishinaabe he must police. That crisis comes to a head when he must break up a bar fight among Indians (73) and later take down his own drunk father while trying not to hurt him (77). Losing his Indian fiancée to a car accident, Luke relocates to Waukegan, Illinois. He gets sick of the corruption, so he "switches sides" to try working as an investigator for the public defender's office. After a

new white girlfriend dies of a brain tumor, Luke decides he can no longer handle other people's misery, and he returns to the rez, ending the novel abruptly.

Dirty Copper gives a sense of life on a reservation and briefly recalls boarding school experience, but Northrup focuses on chronicling Luke's attempts to reintegrate after combat and build a career and satisfying romantic life under the pressures of racism. A fair amount of story-swapping with other ex-Marines and a sense that shared military service creates a bond that trumps racial allegiances show that Luke identifies as much as a veteran as an Indian. Northrup puts traumatic combat flashbacks in italics, and the only help Luke has in wrestling with such demons comes from his two understanding lovers. There is also some sense that acceptance from warrior elders aids Luke's healing. In the novel's introduction, Margaret Noodin (Anishinaabe) makes a connection between Anishinaabe and Vietnamese: "Consider the fact that the indigenous people of Vietnam were fighting to be free from colonial control, lived in round handmade homes with roofs thatched the way wigwams are fringed, centered their seasons on rice, and then consider how difficult it would be to serve a nation destroying a people and a culture that looked very much like one under quiet, continual siege back home" (4-5). Luke draws no such parallel, however. Any familial recognition of the enemy is either buried far below the surface of the text or supplied by readers like Noodin. Luke says nary a word about the politics of the Vietnam war, and does not question or ratify its worth. Instead, he thinks about the people he served with and the trials they endured.

Northrup is well-known at least among Native readers as the witty columnist who wrote *Fond du Lac Follies*. His style in *Dirty Copper* reflects that newspaper work, with lots of short, declarative sentences. Perhaps because his Indian identity is common knowledge, his bio blurb emphasizes his military experience in great specificity and his writing career rather than his tribal

affiliation: “Jim Northrup is an award-winning journalist, poet, and playwright. He is a combat Vietnam veteran, serving with India Company, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division in-country from September of 1965 until September of 1966” (back cover). *Dirty Copper* offers another excellent example of an Indian writer putting the Indian detective novel to different purposes from the straightforward whodunits favored by non-Indians working in the genre.

Failed Mysteries or Fine Novels?

Wayne Johnson also hails from Minnesota and sets in its Northwoods a couple novels that feature an Indian protagonist and that tread Mystery turf; the promotional copy for *Don't Think Twice* (1999) offers a friend's suspect suicide and other calamities that “lead Paul into a staggering game of deceit and murder.” Johnson's dust jacket bio informs us that “he grew up in the north lakes region of Minnesota and on the White Earth and Red Lake Reservations,” though he does not announce a tribal affiliation on his cover blurbs or on his webpage www.waynejohnsonauthor. I sent the most politic “pardon me, but are you an Indian?” email I could compose, and Johnson replied promptly and graciously with a detailed explanation of his upbringing. Johnson has a maternal grandfather who was Native but passed for non-Native “white.” Johnson explains that “I primarily grew up in the Twin Cities, but I spent formative seasons hunting and fishing on both White Earth and Red Lake reservations.”

Johnson's connection to his Indian heritage motivated him to write *Don't Think Twice* and the follow-up Paul Two Persons novel, *Six Crooked Highways* (2000): “Having this background caused me to find, later, most ‘popular’ fictional representations of natives not only willfully ignorant, but sometimes downright stupid.” Johnson could have touted his genealogy and thus scored more cultural credibility with prospective readers, but perhaps he wanted them to

judge authenticity on the novels' own merits. Perhaps he also did not want to be boxed in by any "Indian writer" expectations, or, apparently, by detective genre expectations, as with most of the Native American writers we have been discussing.

A reviewer opines of *Don't Think Twice* that "the elements of a potentially strong mystery—a character with a troubled past, a puzzling murder and shady business dealings—are present in Johnson's debut, but the novel, although beautifully written, fails to generate suspense" ("Don't Think Twice"). Johnson's first novel was actually *The Snake Game* (1990), which is not a murder mystery, but the reviewer is correct that *Don't Think Twice* is not a taut thriller—it devotes much time to sketching in people and place in atmospheric detail rather than tightening the screws on the reader by alternating danger and tantalizing clues. The reviewer also finds protagonist Paul Two Persons "self-absorbed" and does not approve of his investigative techniques, such as they are: "Many details—how Paul is keeping the resort financially afloat, for example—are missing from the story, and too many important plot elements are simply handed to Paul (in one scene, a woman, unprompted, unravels much of the mystery for him). The solution, then, is unrelated to his efforts" ("Don't Think Twice"). These are also legitimate observations, but notice the criteria the reviewer uses to gauge this novel. The first words of the review are "a potentially strong mystery," and the rest of the review shows how *Don't Think Twice* fails to measure up to the genre's conventions, especially the idea of fair play between writer and readers, and the notion that the hero's efforts will directly result in a solution. And yet Johnson does not call *Don't Think Twice* "A Paul Two Persons Mystery"; the cover makes the wide-open promise of "A Novel" and that aforementioned promotional copy, though teasing readers with the reviewer's "elements of a potentially strong mystery," never pronounces the book a whodunit. Perhaps conditioned by all those Indian detective yarns, the reviewer

brings the Hillerman yardstick to her/his task. Those expectations will probably be shared by most of the reviewer's audience, but it would be more generous to consider the interesting ways Johnson adapts the form to his own purposes rather than chide him for writing a failed mystery and simply steer readers away from the novel.

Six Crooked Highways more overtly promises a mystery. The cover entices us with crime and detection:

Paul pushes forward to unravel an overarching plot that extends beyond the boundaries of reservation politics. A murdered state cop, development plans mapped in indigenous code, and a missing boy who witnesses too much are all linked by a crucial piece of evidence: an Indian fetish accidentally dropped by a mysterious man who is involved in the scheme.

But as in *Don't Think Twice*, mysterious men and their schemes share the narrative spotlight. One reviewer labels the novel as "part character study and part fast-moving mystery" and suggests its rewards come more from the evocation of Paul and his world:

Readers may guess the villain before Paul does, and the details of the conspiracy, turning on mineral discovery on the reservation, may seem unduly convoluted. But more important are Johnson's vivid portrayals of life on a reservation and of the conflict between a traditional people venerating the natural world and an aggressively technological society exploiting it. ("Six Crooked Highways")

In our email exchange, Johnson makes clear his primary goal in writing the Paul Two Persons novels: "*Don't Think Twice* and *Six Crooked Highways* are derived from real situations, real people, real native life. I wanted readers to be entertained by them, but to come away with something socially, historically, and politically of value. A true sense of a culture and people

and the beauty in both.” Johnson is less interested in running readers through ingenious puzzles than in countering what he sees as “not only willfully ignorant, but sometimes downright stupid” representations of Indians in popular culture.

Hom-Astubby on the Range

D.L. Birchfield (Choctaw) subtitles his novel *Black Silk Handkerchief* (2006) “A Hom-Astubby Mystery,” but like many of his fellow Native American writers working in the genre, he is more interested in exploring his protagonist than in writing an effective whodunit and allowing the readers to play detective alongside Choctaw photojournalist turned lawyer turned outdoor photographer Hom-Astubby. The exposition, delivered through third-person narration, of Hom-Astubby’s thoughts and his dialogue with a host of characters, eats up pages as the plot barely advances. After a major break in the case—through enlarging a panoramic crime scene photo, Hom-Astubby notices a camera lens in the foliage that leads him to discover a white supremacist safe house on a bluff overlooking the murder site—the narrative spends chapters 25-28 on Hom-Astubby flirting with and seducing Olympic downhill skier Avalon “Avalanche” O’Neill before resuming the detective plot. Hom-Astubby does take actions that eventually lead to identifying a killer, but as in Washburn’s novel, there is no concern about giving readers information to solve the mystery, and readers do not even meet the perpetrator until late in the story.

In a cover blurb, Joseph Bruchac acknowledges that Birchfield is putting the Mystery formula to unconventional uses: “In this unique novel, Birchfield blends elements of the detective story (semi-hardboiled) and the ‘journey’ without losing any of the insights into modern American Indian life and the offbeat humor that are the author’s hallmark.” There are some laughs (a small-town sheriff is named “Klewłusz,” though he doesn’t seem especially

clueless) as well as a great deal of wish-fulfillment. Once a down-on-his-luck journalist hounded by the powerful business interests he had provoked and, not coincidentally, the IRS, Hom-Astubby is now on an astounding run of good luck: he had hit big on an Indian casino slot machine and then bought a ranch worth hundreds of millions of dollars from a wealthy and dying fishing buddy for a few million of his gambling proceeds, he has graduated from law school *and* written a best-selling photography textbook, he motors around in a fabulous recreational vehicle painted in an Oklahoma Sooners Cream and Red color scheme, he wins the glamorous Avalanche, and, in symbolic revenge for the bad deals negotiated with his people in the past (the novel's title refers to one item exchanged for Choctaw land), he extracts \$100 million each for his girlfriend and himself from a powerful and unscrupulous white tycoon. So there is justice in Hom-Astubby besting one of the planet's most powerful and underhanded businessmen, but the result of that payday means both the murderer and *his* killer will remain undiscovered. Not a very satisfying denouement for a Mystery, but the whole narrative leading up to that conclusion shows that Birchfield is trying for other pleasures than the detective novel's puzzle-solving. Bruchac suggests (possibly without thinking about all the implications) that "elements of the mystery" must be handled carefully lest they interfere with "insights into modern American Indian life," and though he gives Birchfield credit for doing so, the balance Birchfield achieves tilts pretty far away from a good detective tale.

Jake Neptune's Occupation

The aforementioned Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki), like Wayne Johnson, puts the Mystery genre to work educating readers, and makes those aims explicit in the preface (unusually given a title, "Behind the Monster") to *Chenoo* (2016):

Chenoo. It's the name of one of the mythic—or perhaps not so mythic—creatures from our northeastern Algonquin cultures. Formerly a human being, it was transformed into an insatiable cannibal monster by its own greed. The fact that such a creature figures into the plot is one reason why I call this novel by that name. But this is not just a story about a monster. It's also about Native American rights, about the power of tradition and story, about martial arts—all rolled up into what is ostensibly a sort of detective novel. (v)

That double qualification (“ostensibly a sort of”) reveals how loosely the novel will follow the Hillerman model.

Chenoo's protagonist Jacob “Podjo” Neptune is a Penacook; the Penacook are one of several bands known together as Abenaki. A late-night phone call from his friend Dennis sets the plot in motion: two Indians have been murdered, members of a group who have taken over a northeastern state park the government plans to auction off to private interests. The occupiers call themselves the “Children of the Mountain” and claim the mountain as tribal land. Dennis requests that Jake solve the crimes before the surrounding state troopers use the murders as a pretext for storming the encampment. When Jake joins the Children of the Mountain undercover to conduct his investigation, he links the state's attitude to past U.S. practices: “Now it looked like we Indians were *in danger*. They might have to rescue us from ourselves. That had been the historic logic applied by the American government when they'd established the boarding schools in the nineteenth century” (124, italics in original).

In his first-person narration, Jake twice makes the conventional mystery novel move of contrasting his exploits with fictional fare to bolster their realism. Trying to connect the dots after he is ambushed by four bikers at the airport (whom he dispatches with his martial arts prowess), Jake notes “I've learned that real life doesn't move with the near mechanical precision

of a *Mission Impossible* plot” (24). And Jake explains how his takedown of another operative trying to keep him from reaching the mountain encampment differs from the popular culture image of bopping bad guys on the head: “I didn’t try to knock him out. People only do that in the movies or in books whose authors don’t realize the delicacy, as well as the toughness, of the human skull and its carefully cushioned pink-packed sponge of a brain. Some people never wake up from a serious concussion” (46).

Jake does share some methods with his “fictional” counterparts. For instance, like many a paperback P.I., he makes lists of bits of information to see if a pattern will emerge, though these scratch notes share space with “my first drafts of really bad poems” (23). Jake draws parallels between these two mental activities as he later reflects on ancient poet Li Bai: “Maybe he was a detective, too. Poets are supposed to be good at putting things together. And Li Bai was also described as one of the greatest swordsmen of his time. A guy who was poet and a sort of knight errant, man of action and a man of dreams, might be a detective” (69). Jake never suffers doubt over his “man of action” credentials, but he downplays his own investigative powers. For instance, Jake teases readers with the idea that he is super-observant, but then comically deflates that notion: “Being a detective, I had figured out that we were being tailed. My vast deductive abilities were abetted by Dennis’s police band radio that he’s kept tuned to their discussions of our progress” (66). Still, Jake does give himself some credit in the deduction department; as he realizes how the occupation was planned by Chief Polis and Mikwe, a childhood friend and leader of the Children of the Mountain, Jake thinks “I was starting to piece a few things together and acting like a real detective” (128).

Jake may be “a real detective,” but one with a difference. He characterizes himself as a *Native* investigator and suggests what that might entail while reflecting on past carousing and

casework: “I had my own share of Iroquois acquaintances, some from my heavy drinking days in the Indian steelworker bars of Brooklyn. (I can show you the scars.) Others were clients who had come to me with the kind of problems that a non-Native detective couldn’t understand, much less solve. (I can show you more scars from that)” (74). Jake does not offer examples of such problems; we just have to take his word for it that Indian readers would, supposedly, not need such illustrations, and non-Indian readers, like non-Native detectives, would not understand them. Likewise, Jake shows insider knowledge of Indians when he overhears a conversation in the woods: “I listened and heard . . . the sound of human voices—two voices talking to each other. One had the Indian’s distinct way of speaking of an Indian, the other was a white man” (178). Again, the novel does not share that overheard conversation with readers.

Being a native investigator for Jake also apparently involves supernatural capabilities. Right from that initial phone call, the novel highlights Jake’s beyond ordinary understanding. Dennis says, “How you always know it’s me when I call?” Jake thinks, “As if he had to ask after all we’ve been through together? . . . Dennis knew two things. First, that I do not have caller ID, and second, that I have this way of knowing things that most folks do not” (4). Jake puts that talent to practical use when he picks up a dowsing rod and finds a spring for the Children of the Mountain occupiers, who are blockaded by the state police and are desperate for a water source (133). Such purported skills are not claimed solely by Indians, of course. Neither is Jake’s feeling of being watched as he searches the forest for his buddy Dennis, though in his three-paragraph reflection on the phenomenon, he makes a primal versus civilized distinction that he attributes to his profession but has so often been invoked as the reason for special powers among “primitives”: “Most people have had that feeling at one time or another, but have been civilized enough to ignore it. Being civilized, though, is a luxury that people in my line of work can’t

afford” (141). Jake develops this primal theme, however, along decidedly Indian lines as he explains that despite what “ethnologists have pointed out,” his people’s monster legends are not simply to scare children into behaving properly:

But our aboriginal hearts know that there is more to these stories than the fright factor. They are elemental. There is still something held in the earth and stone of this continent that is older than humans, stronger than wind, colder than ice, hotter than fire. It is power, analogous perhaps to that energy locked into the ore that can be refined into Uranium 235. (178)

His mentor tries to prepare Jake for the gift of access to that power—““One who is mteowlin,’ Uncle John said to me one spring morning when I was thirteen, ‘knows how to see that power, sense it. Call helpers. Find things’”—but young Jake is reluctant to claim it: “But I didn’t want to understand. I didn’t want to be different from anyone” (179). Grown-up Jake, however, embraces the gift; when Jake and Dennis come upon bodies mauled by the alleged monster, Jake narrates, “Everything we heard—and everything I sensed, using that other way I had of feeling—told us that whatever had attacked them had moved on” (196-7). And sometimes this power speaks to Jake more directly, through signs and dreams.

While Jake drives to the airport to catch his flight to meet Dennis, a hawk “swooped down toward me, almost touching my windshield. So deliberate that it seemed as if it was delivering a message to me” (14). Though Jake holds out the possibility that such an occurrence might simply “make us look out for some menace heading our way that we might otherwise miss” (15), the hawk proves prophetic as Jake is soon assaulted by the bikers. Jake holds that “There’s always more than one level to everything. There’s that which we can see and that which we cannot see until we close our eyes and look deeper within” (70). Again, he admits his

dreams may just be occasions for his mind to assign “symbolic challenges to stand for the real things yet to be faced,” but does maintain that in his dreams “I see the faces of people I haven’t yet met, observe exact details of rooms I later enter for the first time. I’ve seen where things were lost or hidden and then been able to find them in places I visited in my sleep” (71). For example, Jake uses a remembered dream to lead rescuers to a cave where the injured Ruth Cook lies hidden from the attacker who killed two of her fellow Children of the Mountain (94).

Dreams become more than portents or clues in two sequences where Jake does battle in the dream world, first with an ancient Mohawk warrior, a traditional enemy of the Penacook, and then with the titular monster Chenoo. Both times upon Jake’s return to the conscious world, readers get signs that these episodes cannot be dismissed as *mere* dreams. The first dream ends when the warrior turns into a cloud of dust from which a moth emerges, only to be swallowed by a diving cat owl, and waking Jake “saw something on the ground next to my foot. I watched as the dawn wind blew it away—the tattered, large-eyed wing of an io moth” (80). Because these are the last words of the chapter, readers have extra time to ponder their import. And in case we miss the implications, Dennis had remarked when Jake first woke up, “You call that a *kata*, right? Pretending to be fighting with an imaginary opponent like that. Man, you were moving like a wild man. Your eyes were shut the whole time!” (79). Likewise, Jake wakes from his battle with Chenoo to find his cheek bloodied (182).

Jake’s dream encounters grow more organically out of a particular Indian history and culture than do the generic “Indian powers” of many fictional detectives, wise elder shaman characters, or malevolent indigenous adversaries. They are part of the novel’s mission to educate readers (as the “Preface” proclaims) about “Native American rights, about the power of tradition and story” (v); Bruchac infuses the tale with social commentary, history lessons, and cultural

lore. Jake's first-person narration reveals Bruchac's calculation that most of his readers do not come equipped with such knowledge: "I decided to defer any serious worries about my amigo. After all, Dennis and I had agreed to meet around noon. 'Around' tends to be a bigger circle for an Indian when we're talking about time" (132). These asides even sometimes come at the expense of maintaining narrative suspense. For example, Jake interrupts his dream battle with the Mohawk to spend a paragraph catching readers up on Abenaki-Mohawk relations over the centuries (74).

Like those action sequences that sometimes step aside for such instruction, the mystery plot takes a back seat to Jake's opinions, especially on Indian versus white worlds, and on his relationships with people like Dennis, Mikwe, and Jake's former lover and fellow state park campground occupier Katlin. *Chenoo*'s treatment of its supernatural elements also differs from many Indian detective novels that serve readers a taut mystery with perhaps a remaining uncanny sheen of the unexplained along with the satisfying, rational explanation for the crime. Here, we do get the monster unmasked: the perpetrator, aided in his grisly work by two powerful and vicious dogs of an unknown breed, turns out to be former professional wrestler Packy Palehua from Hawaii, retired from the ring because he had actually injured too many "opponents" in the staged spectacles; Jake comments "the Chenoo spirit was truly in him" (208). Palehua was hired by gaming interests, Indian and non-Indian, who seek to end the occupation so they can buy the mountain in auction from the state and set up a casino. Unlike more conventional mysteries (such as most Indian detective novels written by non-Indians), no clues prepare us for this surprise revelation. Similarly, even though Jake quips, "Time to call all the suspects into the library," the evidence incriminating the three conspirators among the Children of the Mountain is scarcely available to readers. *Chenoo* does not play by fair clueing rules many readers expect

from their mysteries, and while it does conclude like so many Indian detective novels that flirt with the supernatural by supplanting a spectre with flesh-and-blood human (and canine) culprits, there is nothing coyly uncanny about Jake Neptune's encounters beneath the surface of the ordinary everyday world.

If the Wrong Tree Falls in the Forest

Naomi M. Stokes's *The Tree People* (1995) also would likely fail to live up to the criteria for the well-made mystery. Despite the murders and the supernatural dread that hangs over the characters, the novel is really the tale of a brave white woman who must face the loss of her husband while running his logging business and raising her two children. Two Indian police officers, a Quinault brother and sister (one in tribal and one in other local law enforcement), operate around the margins of the plot, their shamanic grandfather warns of the evil set free when a witch is released after centuries from his tomb inside the roots of an old-growth giant of a tree (another witch, a red-head who sells natural cures to unwitting tourists, has manipulated the logging crew into accidentally felling just that wrong tree), people wander off into the woods or suicidally walk off ocean-side cliffs under the influence of an evil mist, and the crimes are eventually somehow solved without any deliberate sleuthing. These fantastic and melodramatic elements do not tax our suspension of disbelief so much when stretched out into a long novel—it is actually an entertaining read—but no one would confuse the convoluted plot with the lean efficiency of a Hillerman mystery. As noted earlier, Stokes worked as a journalist covering the logging industry on the Olympic Peninsula, so she knows that world, but she comes to the Quinault cultural materials as an outsider (she announces her Cherokee lineage in her bio). I am wary of propagating any genetic fallacy here, but even as an outsider to the Indian culture she

writes about, Stokes fits a pattern we have witnessed among other indigenous writers who decide to work with the Mystery: *investigation* and/or *investigators* pushed out of the narrative center.

Not Between Two Worlds

Mardi Medawar (Cherokee), in addition to her *Murder on the Red Cliff Rez* (2002) set in present times, has inventively adapted the Mystery genre with her Kiowa healer Tay-bodal series. She imagines how an indigenous investigator would operate in the 1860s. Tay-bodal straddles the divide Gina MacDonald, Andrew MacDonald, and Gina Sheridan indicate with the title of their study, *Shaman or Sherlock?: The Native American Detective*. In the fourth title, *The Ft. Larned Incident* (2000), the white soldiers are a constant presence on the periphery of the story—the action unfolds outside the titular cavalry fort. But the action is entirely contained within the Kiowa community camped around the fort. It is a refreshing approach, since most Indian detective novels dwell on the interactions between Indians and non-Indians. Medawar attempts to recreate a vital Kiowa community taking care of its own issues rather than self-consciously being “Indian” in engaging with white outsiders. Of course we can never know what life in a Kiowa encampment in the 1860s was really like beyond the evidence of oral histories or outsider accounts, but the tribal politics and forms of justice portrayed ring true to the best of my limited ability to judge, and Medawar makes a serious effort to have her detective Tay-bodal emerge organically from his time and culture rather than parachute in from an Agatha Christie whodunit.

A Strong Case for NAGPRA

With *Ghost Singer* (1994), Anna Lee Walters (Pawnee/Otoe-Missouria) seeks to bring an indigenous sensibility to a contemporary mystery. Because of the Indian bones and artifacts held captive in the Smithsonian Institute (a motif Hillerman explored in 1989's *Talking God*), an avenging spirit is released and causes some white workers to go crazy and commit suicide and one Indian employee to turn gravely ill. A team of wise old Indians comes to Washington to restore the balance and redress the wrongs. The storyline is tough to follow and certainly does not employ the cause and effect logic of either a detective or any other kind of novel. One can say either that (positive spin) Walters resists the Mystery formula or that (negative spin) she has written a rich mess of a novel. But it does make sense that this novel offers no satisfying whodunit-style solution since the issue it spotlights itself is unresolved; the arguments over science and respect have not abated after The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act was passed in 1990.

More Vampires Terrorize the Southwest

A.A. Carr (Navajo/Laguna Pueblo) writes a much more coherent supernatural thriller in *Eye Killers* (1996). There are mysterious elements, but he makes no pretense to offering a mystery. Eastern European vampires have roosted in the Desert Southwest, and their leader chooses Melissa Roanhorse as his next bride. Her grandfather, Navajo sheepherder/shaman Michael Roanhorse, must fight the vampires for her soul. Carr works the same turf as Martin Cruz Smith did twenty years earlier with *Nightwing* (but with vampires instead of vampire bats) and as David and Aimée Thurlo would in *Second Sunrise* (2004). With *Eye Killers*, we edge away from the Indian detective, but we do get the spectacle of a Navajo fighting evil. From my

perspective in this study, it is telling that Carr, like so many other Indian writers, foregoes the ready path to an audience marked by Hillerman's fiction. *Eye Killers* also handles the Dialectic of Diversity in an unusual way, for the vampires, ancient and mostly imported, are both exotic and utterly familiar as literary types, and the Navajo medicine man Roanhorse is both exotic for almost all readers yet comfortably domestic as a grandfather trying to rescue his granddaughter from sexual danger.

Thumps Is Hardly Hard-Boiled

Thomas King (Cherokee) writes a more conventional whodunit, but he pokes fun at the genre with *DreadfulWater Shows Up* (2003). His pen name Hartley GoodWeather signals the comic intent, as does his similarly absurdly-named Cherokee detective Thumps DreadfulWater. The title also puts comic pressure on the idea of detective agency (apologies to Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones for stealing this pun from the title of their 1999 *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*); the detective is certainly expected to do more than show up! And Thumps does, as King delivers a satisfying mystery. The son of a Montana reservation's tribal leader (who is also a former lover of Thumps) disappears at the same time a body is discovered in a luxury condo at the tribe's brand-new casino complex, so Thumps tries to find the young man, clear his name, and identify the killer. But even if King gives readers the kind of Mystery they expect, the whole affair is decidedly tongue-in-cheek, as one can judge from the cover art (fig. 14):

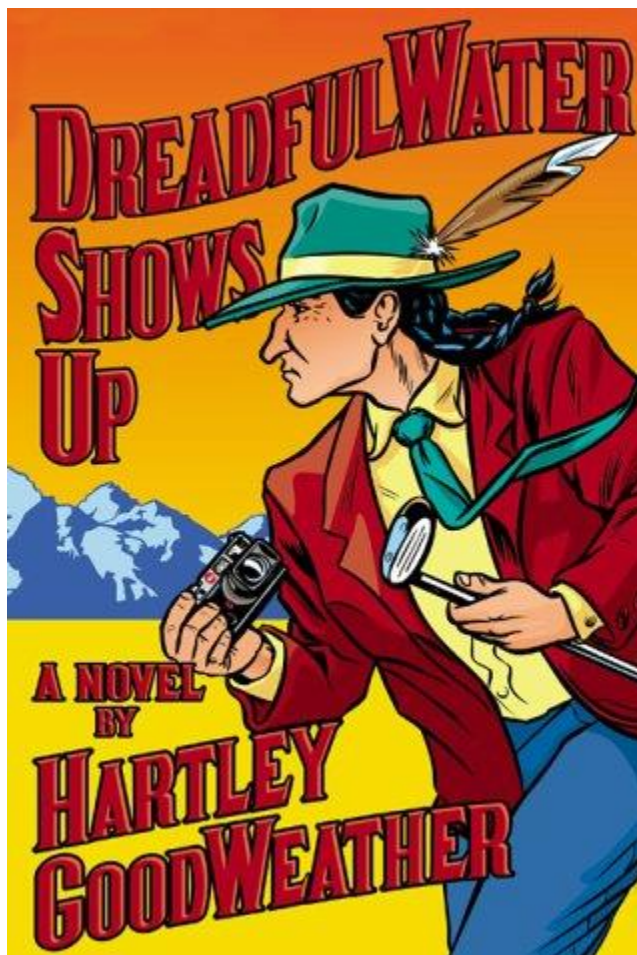


Fig. 14. Goodweather, Hartley. *Dreadfulwater Shows Up*. HarperFestival, 2002.

The gumshoe's fedora is adorned with an eagle feather, and the weapons of choice for this modern warrior are a camera and a golf club.

Alexie Exposes Cultural Colonizers

At least one indigenous author does not share King's gentle amusement at the Hillerman phenomenon of Indian detective bestsellers. As I noted in Chapter 1, Sherman Alexie has written a critique of white contributions to Indian literature into his own Mystery novel, *Indian Killer* (1996), where a young Native woman confronts a white professor whose Native American

Literature course contains not one text written by an actual Indian. On the professor's syllabus is an Indian mystery by Jack Wilson, a white writer who fancies himself a genuine Indian because of a concocted ancestral mythology. The name of Wilson's protagonist, Aristotle Little Hawk, suggests the uneasy hybrid of classical logic and tribal wisdom such characters purvey. In 1997, probably unaware of Alexie's novel, James V. Morrison suggests that "if Aristotle were alive today" he would be reading Hillerman novels, showing how well such fictions accord with Western logic. Classics professor Morrison does not venture to guess what any reanimated Indians would be reading (67). I only wish that Alexie had literally parodied the writings of the "Jack Wilsons" and the adventures of the "Aristotle Little Hawks"—it would be fun to read an embedded spoof of Hillerman (who of course claims no such ancestry). Perhaps, however, that is the point—Alexie has tried to silence Jack Wilson and his real-life counterparts.

Alexie's critique of the mystery novel runs deeper than that swipe at Hillerman. The structure of the novel resists the familiar pattern of the detective story. *Indian Killer* refuses us the neat closure that we expect a mystery to deliver; the title's ambiguity remains at the conclusion—is the "Indian Killer" an Indian who kills or someone who kills Indians? Perhaps because of that ambiguity, Alexie has reportedly called *Indian Killer* a failed mystery (Westron), but I suggest that it is the Mystery genre that failed as a vehicle for *Indian Killer*'s message of unresolved or even unresolvable racial conflict. For all the anger in this novel, Alexie does provide occasional touches of the humor more pervasive in most of his other works. My favorite moment is when a killer sneaks past a police stakeout and notices that a cop has fallen asleep with a Hillerman paperback on his chest (300).

Two Victims Who Are Not Plot Devices

If readers are expecting a well-wrought whodunit from Choctaw novelist Ron Query's *The Death of Bernadette Lefthand* (1993), they will likewise be disappointed. Like a Hillerman tale, the novel features a murder and is set on the Hopi and Navajo reservations, which by the 1990s surely primed readers to expect something in the Hillerman vein. The top of the front cover features this recommendation from Hillerman: "*The Death of Bernadette Lefthand* should rank among the classics of American fiction." And while neither Hillerman's blurb nor the novel's title proclaims that the reader is holding a murder mystery, the back cover is cagey about the novel's genre affiliation, mentioning "the mysterious death of a young Indian dancer" and promising Hillermanesque pleasures with this teaser: "Even today, amid the sere hills of Arizona and New Mexico, the Navajo believe witchcraft is at work. Some suspect it is the unseen force behind the brutal murder of Bernadette Lefthand." But the story that unfolds between these two covers is far different from a Hillerman police procedural.

Though we are never privy to Bernadette's thoughts, perhaps to add to the sense of mystery around her death, Query passes the first and third person narration around between several characters instead of opting for the controlling and limited viewpoint of a detective (or detectives as in the Hillerman novels that often alternate between Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee's points of view). In fact, no detective appears in this text to decode Bernadette's "mysterious" death. There is some morose retrospection among the survivors after her murder, but the victim is alive during the bulk of the storytelling, some in flashback and some relayed as the action unfolds. Rather than feeling that satisfying click when a murder plot and its perpetrator are revealed, in *The Death of Bernadette Lefthand* we follow the witch as he systematically poisons Bernadette's marriage and turns her husband against her in revenge for an earlier humiliation.

The killer's segments of the narrative are told in third person and cast in an italic font, which strangely dislocates the character and his supernatural machinations from the novels' normal diegetic world that the other characters inhabit. Although the novel reveals the murderer, the crime goes unsolved and a set-up innocent goes to jail—a second victim whose fate will not be avenged. Rather than the tidy denouement the reader might expect from the novel's packaging as an Indian country murder mystery, *The Death of Bernadette Lefthand*, like so many other specimens of crime fiction written by Indians, offers no reassurance that justice will be done.

Mystery Lovers

In *The Crown of Columbus* (1991), Michael Dorris (Modoc) and Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe) actually do use a mystery and its solution to structure their narrative, if not necessarily to propel readers through it, but this novel is no grisly dead-body-discovery-within-the-first-five-pages sort of detective story. Dartmouth faculty members Vivian Twostar of the Native American Studies Department and English professor Roger Williams, a stiff New England blue blood, are both working on Columbus projects: Roger will recast the exploits of “the Admiral” in an epic poem, and Vivian has been recruited to provide Dartmouth's alumni magazine with the Native perspective on the upcoming quincentenary. The two are also secretly lovers who become estranged when Vivian gets pregnant, and besides some hints that an alumni family named Cobb has spent 150 years trying to recover an unidentified something that the university has lost, the novel spends 128 pages sketching in their evolving relationship and the birth of their daughter. It is not until a member of the persistent Cobb family sends money for plane tickets to the Bahamas and then a mysterious piece of writing that *may* be Christopher Columbus's hand emerges that the action moves along toward mystery territory and the novel generates criminal suspense in the

new locale. But *Crown of Columbus* has a lot going on besides that mystery loosely holding the plot together, with its meditations on Columbus's shifting and disparate legacies, the politics of academe, the struggles of family life, and the allegorical relations between cultures that Vivian and Roger represent (Roger's unacknowledged namesake being the founder of Providence Plantation and an early white student of Native languages known for advocating fair treatment of Indians).

One Mystery Changes Tack, and Another Steadfastly Remains Mysterious

Two of Erdrich's solo novels show even more indifference toward the mystery genre's conventions. I briefly discussed *The Round House* (2012) last chapter regarding debates over the authenticity of characters created by writers who don't share their race, gender, age, etc. This novel teases readers with a whodunit set-up: a young Indian woman and her baby are missing, and the 13-year-old Ojibwe protagonist Joe's mother Geraldine is raped and barely escapes her attacker with her life. We follow Joe and his three friends as they try to identify the perpetrator, but that mystery evaporates halfway through and the novel turns from a mystery to a tale of retribution. The results of Joe's quest are unsettling rather than providing the pleasure of the traditional mystery's closure, as a classroom exercise I conducted with my student readers indicates. On one end of a board covering an entire classroom wall, I wrote "There is justice in *The Round House*," and on the other, "There is no justice in *The Round House*." My students had five minutes to talk to each other and arrange themselves where they "stood" on the question of justice in this novel and then try to convince classmates to move toward their positions on this spectrum of justice. Since this novel was a Common Book at my college, I have repeated this experiment a few times, and the line of students always extends from one end of the spectrum to

the other. I doubt that more than a few of the Indian detective novels written by non-Indians would produce similar results.

What does not evaporate halfway through the novel is the pain of Geraldine's rape. Unlike murder mysteries where all victims conveniently leave the stage after their demise, *The Round House* makes readers live with Geraldine's struggle to heal, chapter after chapter, through Joe's eyes. Geraldine has some brighter days that fill Joe and his father Basil with hope, followed by retreats into the darkness of her bedroom. Joe and Basil try different strategies to bring back the Geraldine they knew, but Joe slowly realizes that there is no simple returning from such trauma. During one of her retreats to the bedroom, Geraldine even scolds Joe for trying to force her recovery by prying information from her to help him track down the culprit:

Now you listen to me, Joe. You will not badger or harass me. You will leave me to think the way I want to think, here. I have to heal any way I can. You will stop asking questions and you will not give me any worry. You will not got after him. You will not terrify me, Joe. I've had enough fear for my whole life. You will not add to that fear. You will not add to my sorrows. You will not be part of this. (*sic*, 89-90)

Joe, after stewing for a short while, resumes his investigation. He confronts his father with a piece of evidence, a gas can sunk in a lake, that he had earlier discovered but the police had overlooked. Joe believes that no one else will fight for his mother like he will.

Though Geraldine insists she must complete her own journey toward healing, Joe, his father, and the community are a "part of this." The hurt touches others in ways most mysteries would not take the time to consider or dramatize. Sarah Deer cites this novel in "trying to conceive of the community harm that is done by extremely high rates of rape" of Indian women. Deer observes how hearing the story from Joe's perspective "underscores the ripple effect

both son and father suffer greatly in processing the experience that their mother and wife has suffered. Their lives are forever changed, which in turn, changes the other people in their worlds” (10). Joe makes the perpetrator pay for his crimes against Geraldine and the other Indian woman whom we eventually realize he has murdered, but the novel forces us to think more intently than most mysteries about the costs and what could ever count *as* payment. Perhaps this deeper engagement with individual and communal trauma as well as Joe’s vigilantism produced my students’ judgments over the full spectrum between justice and no justice.

Though not a murder mystery, Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* (1984) is framed by a woman’s death and her family’s attempt to make sense of it. While *The Round House* allows readers to settle into whodunnit expectations before changing the rules, *Love Medicine* never promises that a resourceful individual will uncover the truth and provide closure. Unlike the neat denouement of the classic detective story’s drawing room scene, there is no answer to the riddle of June Kashpaw’s suicide; or, we could say that the entire book is the answer. The moment when Lipsha Morrissey asks his fugitive Uncle Gerry Nanapush whether he actually killed a state trooper underlines this resistance to the detective formula: “I’m sorry but I just don’t trust to write down what he answered, yes or no. We have entered an area of too deep water. Let’s just say he answered: ‘That’s the penetrating mystery of it. Nobody knows’” (364). That Gerry Nanapush is loosely modeled on Leonard Peltier throws white confidence in justice into question (and puts the limits of tribal sovereignty in stark relief). Perhaps the word “mystery” has different connotations for many Indian and non-Indian writers. Even in white cultures a criminal mystery and a religious mystery call for different responses; one may contemplate or marvel at a religious mystery, but one is not expected to solve it.

The Indian Way to Write Mysteries

Thus we can see plenty of evidence that Native American writers who work in the Mystery genre tend to adapt it to their purposes and not follow its conventions so closely as non-Indians who write Indian detective novels, but I hope not to be too reductive in pointing out that pattern. Like any generalization, the idea of an Indian way of writing mysteries pushes us toward unhelpful essentialisms and fails to convey the variety of these texts. For example, Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet) begins *All the Beautiful Sinners* (2003) like so many detective stories: small town Texas Sheriff Tom Gentry is gunned down and his Deputy Sheriff Jim Doe tries to find the killer. But the novel's narrative points of view soon proliferate to include several FBI agents, other police officers, serial killers (!) and their victims. The plot turns from a whodunit into a suspenseful hunt for "the Tin Man" who, disguised as a firefighter, abducts Indian children after their towns are leveled by tornados, with the Indian Jim Doe confused for the Tin Man's Indian protégé and Gentry's killer to add layers of complexity. The novel delivers a memorable tough guy line in the showdown scene between the Tinman and Jim:

"If you would have done it [shot the Tinman]," he said. "You would have been just like me, James."

Jim Doe felt himself smiling back.

"Wrong," he said. "I'd be *alive*," and then raised the gun back up, pulled the trigger, once. (485, italics in original)

All the Beautiful Sinners is strikingly poetic at times, disturbing in its detailed violence, and challenging emotionally for readers.

Micah S. Hackler's *Legend of the Dead* (1995), on the other hand, offers few surprises for readers familiar with Hillerman's work. The author bio informs us that Hackler "has been

interested in Native American history since his college days and traces his ancestry to Cherokee survivors of the Trail of Tears,” but that interest and ancestry do not lead him to produce a novel noticeably different from any number of Indian Detective mysteries written by authors who claim no such Indian lineage. Senator Williston “looked the part of a distinguished senator: striking silver hair, a slim build, immaculately dressed in a custom-made suit” (11). Waitresses at Las Palmas, New Mexico’s diner are flirtatious. The protagonist, a white sheriff named Cliff Lansing, owns an ornery horse named Cement Head. *Legend of the Dead* is the equivalent of comfort food served by those sassy waitresses.

Hackler is a retired career Air Force major, which might explain the novel’s uncritical stance toward federal authority; here, a wealthy white rancher intent on swindling Zunis manipulates the government, but the Feds eventually do right by the Indians. The senator *may* have been visited by ancient Anasazi spirits—the novel does not ratify or rule out its supernatural elements—who instruct him to defeat “the Destroyer,” that greedy rancher who murderously forwards a land swap between the government and the Zuni nation so that he can plunder an Anasazi dwelling. For thwarting the rancher’s plot, “the tribal members were beyond words in trying to express their gratitude to Williston and the federal government” (234). *Legend of the Dead* offers a potent fantasy like *Dances with Wolves* in which an outsider, Senator Williston, regains his soul and becomes the Indians’ savior. And it fits squarely in the Hillerman mode of lonely Southwestern desert landscapes, a touch of Indian magic, and law enforcement protecting the natives from exploiters.

Although some Indian writers like Hackler have closely followed the Hillerman playbook, the majority have taken the Mystery genre in unconventional directions. The Dialectic of Diversity’s tension between exoticism and assimilation and the promise of truth revealed and

order restored that most readers expect from a detective story have proven too limiting to most Native storytellers.

Conclusion

The Case of the Indian Detective: Expanding the Investigation

As I said in the introduction, I began this study wondering if any Indian detective characters predated Tony Hillerman's Navajo policemen and if Indians writers had also created indigenous sleuths. To my surprise, I found forerunners scattered over nine decades prior to Joe Leaphorn's debut in Hillerman's *The Blessing Way* (1970). Those earlier forays never achieved the notoriety and staying power of Hillerman's mysteries or the commercial success of the dozens of white writers subsequently working this literary vein. I suggest we may attribute the popularity of Hillerman and his non-Indian successors to a shift in the centuries-old project to make the Indian legible to non-Indians as well as to any storytelling talents they brought to the genre. When the Western lost its hold on the public imagination, the Indian Detective novel stepped in to serve that function. I argue that the Mystery genre fulfills that role particularly well because, with its formula of the unknown ultimately becoming known, it readily accommodates what Chad Uran calls the "Dialectic of Diversity Management," the desire in non-Indians for Natives to be represented as both exotic and assimilated. In the Indian Mystery, those mainstream readers enjoy unfamiliar peoples, customs, and places, and sometimes supernatural elements that remain mysterious or are explained away in the conclusion. But they encounter such exotica within an utterly familiar genre and from the perspective of protagonists who largely serve the interests of the dominant culture. Many of these novels offer critiques of racism and injustice inflicted on Indians, but they also reassure readers that justice will prevail and that all Indians, except the occasional villain or misguided Native who obstructs our hero's investigation, share their values about right and wrong, especially the rightness of American justice.

With the increasing popularity of Indian Detective novels since the 1970s, readers have many more opportunities to identify with Indian protagonists who solve crimes and dispense justice, a major break with popular culture representations of Indians prior to the rise of the subgenre. The Indian with a badge or a private investigator license may indeed mark an improvement over the multitudes of savage warriors or noble but vanishing Indians still hanging on in popular culture but more prevalent while the Western rode high in the public imagination. Rather than ruthless antagonists, trusty sidekicks, or less individuated symbols of a frontier to be conquered by white men in large hats, the Indian Detective novel puts a Native at the narrative center. Having many more Indian protagonists in the Mystery genre, even if these novels always attempt to cast them in a positive light, does not necessarily lead to greater justice for real Natives. Still, on balance it is a good thing for non-Indians and Indians to see indigenous detective characters who are caring, intelligent, resourceful, persistent, and brave (or, if you prefer, courageous).

The Indian Detective novel subgenre blossomed under and furthered the broader movement toward multiculturalism in the arts and popular culture. I cannot dismiss possible benefits of greater diversity in popular culture representations. For non-Indian readers of Indian Detective novels, Natives are no longer inhabitants of a nostalgic frontier but living contemporaries. Indian readers finally see more Indian heroes after a dearth of them in popular culture. In Chapter 6 we investigated Indian detectives invented by Indians, a smaller number of entrants into the field but evidence that the subgenre has helped some Native writers attract readers. And finally, on a personal note, if not for multiculturalism and the “Canon Wars” of the 80s and 90s, the academic battles over diversity in literature, I may not have been able to take a course in American Indian Literature at the University of Illinois and so would not likely have

written this study, which I hope will prove valuable to people curious about popular culture messages about Indians.

Multicultural literature may expand readers' horizons and even challenge their world views, yet we must also consider the limitations of multiculturalism to make real improvements in the lives of people whose stories "count" toward measures of diversity. As Jodi Melamed and Roderick Ferguson claim, academic institutions now sanctioning the study of literature about or by people of color may make white people feel enlightened on racism but do little to address and redress the continuing material oppression of people of color, such as that non-Indians inflict on Indians. Further, Indian Detective novels written by non-Indians partake in that oppression. They reinforce the prerogatives of settler states when they could instead be challenging colonialism and promoting sovereignty. In following the dictates of the genre so routinely, they spotlight individual criminals not systematic oppressions and prop up the comforting notion that a good man or woman can make things right in Indian country without disturbing the American social contract. These novels bring greater diversity to the Mystery genre and many of them wrestle with injustices facing Indians, but we must think critically about who controls these representations and whose agendas they further.

Besides Todd Downing's 1930s and 40s novels featuring white detectives, I find no Natives writing Mysteries until the Indian Detective novel rose to subgenre status after Hillerman, Stern, and Garfield publish in the 1970s. As Chapter 6 shows, their number is growing but still small relative to the dozens of whites working the subgenre. Many indigenous writers eschew the marketability of Indian country mysteries, perhaps because they find the genre constrains the kinds of stories they can tell within its formula. But those who have ventured into this territory tend to push back against those constraints and parody the genre or

transform it to serve their needs. Some of their Indian Detective novels downplay the whodunit puzzle to invest readers in their protagonists' lives. Some pay more attention to the impacts of crime on victims and the health and survival of indigenous communities than to the battle of wits between cunning criminal and dogged detective. The Indian detectives even sometimes are minor or peripheral characters. Many Indian Detective novels written by Natives frustrate readers' expectations of the reassuring problem → solution Mystery plot pattern. Unlike the neat closure provided by non-Indian writers in the subgenre, whose Indian detectives routinely uncover the truth and restore order, the outcomes of Indian Detective novels written by Natives much more often leave gnawing doubts that the actions of one rational individual can achieve justice.

New Indian detectives continue to appear in print—the subgenre remains marketable—and there are other venues to explore for Indian detectives than the short stories, novels, television series, and movies I have discussed (plus the titles I have missed). Indian themes are common in young adult fiction, including a good many mysteries. Timothy Green's *Mystery of Coyote Canyon: A Young Adult Mystery* (2008) is one of many examples. A visiting white teen and a Navajo teen (“living with her grandparents in the traditional Indian way”) team up to solve a mystery in Canyon de Chelly and “discover that only true friendship will get them out alive.” It would be worthwhile to consider what other messages besides racial harmony these YA Indian detective fictions convey.

Considering YA readers' fascination with Indian subject matter, it is no surprise that Native American characters now roam video games' virtual worlds. Some of them inhabit criminal environs like those portrayed in countless Mystery novels, but rather than sleuths, indigenous videogame characters appear to be mostly mystical warrior-types. The website *Giant*

Bomb provides 41 examples of intimidating “Native American” characters like Cyborg 005, Danielle Fireseed, Nightwolf, Shadow Wolf, T. Hawk, Warpath, and, presumably combining terrestrial and aerial spirit animals, Wolf Hawkfield (“Native American”). Such avatars open new high-tech opportunities for non-Indians imaginatively to perform Indianness, a form of appropriation Philip J. Deloria connects to the search for an authentically American identity by Euro-Americans and charts back to the Boston Tea Party in *Playing Indian* (1998).

Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw), speaking at a 2014 University of Missouri-Columbia Peace Studies event, contends that “indigenous peoples have not fared well in video games” and characterizes much gameplay as part of broader ongoing efforts to maintain and further colonization: “The transforming and conforming of spaces into maps, land into landscapes, and landscapes into property depend upon the performances and repetitions of colonialism that assert normative control through political, legal, cultural, and racial productions.” According to Byrd, even the creators of *Assassin’s Creed III* (2012), who consulted Native Americans as part of an attempt to guarantee the authenticity of its Revolutionary War setting, play loose with the facts for the sake of the game’s storyline: the half-Mohawk protagonist’s “entire raison d’être is to ensure that the American colonists are successful in the revolution” even though historically the Mohawk most often allied with the British. *Assassin’s Creed III* enables players to choose how a Native American avatar will act and react to the game’s challenges, yet that protagonist’s actions, or at least their impact on the future, are ultimately constrained by the designers to accord with actual outcomes: “Players can climb trees, kill bears with a hatchet, and assassinate British soldiers with a bow and arrow, but what they cannot do is change the inevitable march of history no matter how many British or American colonizers they kill in game.” Byrd shows how the video game genre shapes content when it comes to representations of indigenous peoples, as I

have been arguing here about the Mystery genre. But she also sees “indigenous game designers coming to the fore” to stretch the genre beyond its familiar tales reinforcing colonialism, much as I have tried to illustrate with Indian writers of detective novels in the previous chapter: “there’s a way in which the narrative possibilities of video games can actually serve indigenous storytelling practices that are nonlinear, that have different abilities to connect beyond just sort of plot points and events centered on experiences, but I think we’re still sort of at the beginning of where this can go and are still needing to see more” (“Jodi Byrd on Video Games and Indigeneity”). I suppose it is encouraging that these muscular and well-armed characters seem to be powerful agents rather than the shoot-’em-up fodder of the old Westerns or the victims of many sympathetic novels, but we must continue thinking about which historical narratives such fantasy role-playing endorses outright, subtly supports, or silently excludes.

And finally, Indian detectives have begun popping up in a third genre popular with younger consumers, comic books/graphic novels. The majority of Native American comics characters dwell in the supernatural horror and/or superhero realm. In Mike Grell’s *The Shaman’s Tears* (2011), mixed-race Joshua Brand returns after a long absence to the reservation and struggles with the burden of his ability to transform into an avenging Indian superhero, but eventually accepts the responsibility with melodramatic lines like “I am Stalking Wolf . . . Hunter . . . Healer . . . Warrior . . . Shaman!!” (191). Patricia Briggs’s Indian were-coyote Mercy Thompson makes the leap from novel to graphic novel, though the initial installment *Homecoming* (2009) makes no specific mention of her ethnicity. Perhaps that is also the case in the corresponding print novel; *Night Broken* (2014), the series’ eighth book, features Mercy’s Indian identity much more than the earlier novels.

Though technically from the wrong side of the Pacific for this study, Terry LaBan's Siberian character fits right in with a combination of supernatural indigeneity and Sam Spade sleuthing. LaBan reveals he was inspired to write *Muktuk Wolfsbreath, Hard Boiled Shaman: The Spirit of Boo* (2012) by an exhibit of shamanic artifacts from the Pacific Northwest at Chicago's Field Museum: "Somewhere in there the realization that shamans were kind of like detectives, in that they brought about change by discovering the source of problems, clicked with that classic hard boiled voice, and, suddenly, there was an idea for a character" ("Terry LaBan"). Apparently in third person, for no other author is listed, LaBan provides this disclaimer about his expertise in Siberian Shamanism: "this comic is not intended to be an accurate depiction of either Siberian tribal culture (not that there's just one) or of shamanic practices (which no longer exist, at least as they did before 1918). LaBan is a cartoonist, not a scholar, and has neither the time nor the patience to do serious research" ("Terry LaBan"). At least he makes no pretense of knowing much about the culture he has chosen for his detective to patrol. The radical hybrid of the Siberian tribal setting and the hard-boiled first-person narration—"Lotta guys dream about feasting on roast meat or tracking tigers in the snow. About warm wives on cold nights or bowls of kumiss shared with pals. Me, I dream of madness, loss and despair" (7)—produces stories that engage even after the tongue-in-cheek novelty fades.

Derek Parker Royal assesses three comics that more closely resemble the fictions I have charted in other media. Non-Indians writer Mark Wayne Harris and artist Dennis Francis produced the three-part series *Street Wolf* in 1986. Royal finds oddly incomplete the explanation writer Harris offers for how he chose crime-fighting protagonist Nathan Blackhorse's ethnicity:

In an explanatory note in the inaugural issue, Harris reveals how he could not decide whether to make Nathan a white or a black character. But then, as the writer relates, a

friend and former collaborator “calmly shrugged his shoulders and said, quite matter-of-factly, without hesitation, and with annoying simplicity: ‘So? Why don't you make him an Indian?’ I was struck speechless. Here I was on the verge of ripping out my hair by the handfuls, and he gives me the perfect answer without missing a beat” (31). Harris never goes on to explain why making Blackhorse a Native American was such a “perfect answer,” and nothing about his representation of Blackhorse sheds any light.

Royal suggests that Blackhorse’s Indian ethnicity along with the total lack of specificity *about* that ethnicity lends this hard-boiled character an air of mystery, an attempt at an exotic appeal we have seen so often in our survey of fictional Indian detectives.

Nunzio DeFillippis, Christina Weir, Brian Hurtt, and Arthur Dela Cruz, also all apparently non-Native, pair Navajo tribal cop Ann Adakai with white FBI agent Greg Haworth in *Skinwalker*, a mini comic series released in 2002 and reprinted as a graphic novel in 2003. Royal considers how the horror the team investigates reflects on the creators’ cultural boundary crossing: “the act of skinwalking, wearing another's skin for manipulative purposes, functions as an apt ethnic metaphor. By assuming the perspective of *an Other*, one is professing an authority over that subject, and as such, assumes the responsibilities and burdens of that representation.” *Skinwalker*’s writers likely paid more attention to serving audience expectations than to assuming any responsibilities and burdens of representation. The comic does make an occasional show of deliberate cultural teaching about Indians—a full page between chapters explains and illustrates “How to Build a (Female) Hogan” (no pag.), though it is not clear which if any sources the creators consulted—but most messages about Navajo life, whatever their connection to realities, emerge on the fly and incidentally while Adakai and Haworth chase a rogue white FBI agent who has learned how to use Navajo witchcraft to take other people’s skins

and so assume their identities (and we later discover that the agent is not so rogue after all but rather on an unofficial assignment as the FBI has an entire secret unit devoted to weaponizing indigenous magical practices, taking exploitation into the supernatural realm). Adakai and Haworth follow a familiar template for fictional cop duos. Posting on *Comics Worth Reading*, reviewer Johanna notes that the Navajo cop and FBI agent are “worthy of the best odd-couple pairings common to this genre. The setup and story remind me of similar movies or TV shows with the premise ‘he’s X, she’s Y, together, they’re detectives.’” And *Skinwalker*’s Navajo detective resembles so many other indigenous sleuths in that Adakai is “conflicted about her own feelings towards tradition [but] defends her people’s practices and strength to the overbearing FBI outsiders.”

Detectives naturally speculate about motives, but critics should be cautious. It gives us more confidence when writers “confess” to their motives. Royal considers Jason Aaron’s motivation to write the lengthy reservation noir series *Scalped*, begun in 2007 and illustrated by R. M. Guéra:

Aaron has stated elsewhere that Native American history is “just one of those things I’d always read about, especially the American Indian [M]ovement and the Red Power movement of the ‘70s, and the Leonard Peltier story. So all that just kind of worked together with my desire to do a crime series. . . . I wanted to do, like, a familiar genre, but something that was a little different” (“Sticking with *Scalped*”). In essence, the comic book has its genesis in Aaron’s fascination with generic forms: “It all really came from me loving both westerns and crime stories and wanting to combine the two” (qtd. in Rozier).

The genesis of *Scalped* does not smack of redface minstrelsy like Harris’s trying on different ethnicities for his *Street Wolf* protagonist, but here again the genre comes first, followed by the cultural contents, “something that was a little different.”

Not surprisingly, Aaron adapts Native American history for his storytelling purposes. Like Grell's Joshua Brand, Dashiell "Dash" Bad Horse (a nod to Aaron's hard-boiled literary forebear Dashiell Hammett?) returns to the reservation after a long absence. This protagonist, however, is an FBI informant. Despite some anguish over where Dash's loyalties ought to lie in Volumes 1 *Indian Country* (2007) and 2 *Casino Boogie* (2008), those first two compilations of the long serial (60 issues collected into 12 graphic novels) direct our sympathies toward the federal government's efforts to battle corruption and restore law and order on the reservation. In true noir fashion, the FBI agents themselves are not paragons of virtue, but the real heavy is Lincoln Red Crow, who runs the rez like a mafia don. With Red Crow, Aaron has rearranged elements of real events, presumably for dramatic effect: "Students of Pine Ridge history may sense traces of Dick Wilson, Oglala Lakota boss during the 1970s and his Goon Squad," but "the story also often turns history on its head. Red Crow has ties to militant Native activists; in reality, Wilson and the Goons opposed the American Indian Movement so intensely that several activists were murdered" ("Graphic Novels").

Royal is mostly upbeat about this marriage of genre and Indian subject matter: the very nature of contemporary Native American culture—its troubled history, its mythologies, the social challenges it faces, and the isolation it has had to endure—lends itself well to particular generic translations. In the case of noir fiction and Native representation, the mystery is not one of appropriate applicability. The actual mystery revolves around why more practitioners have not taken advantage of such rich potential. That comment about isolation reveals Royal's sense of Indian otherness, which suggests he may be imagining non-Indian writers carrying on this work of "generic translations," and he seems unconcerned about any effects of those translations on indigenous peoples as he finds the

Mystery appropriately applicable to Native American culture. But the proliferation of non-Indians eager to take “advantage of such rich potential” in other media, as well as Native American writers’ reluctance to play the detective game or their resistance toward the genre’s rules when they do, should make us question what sorts of stories are precluded by using the template of a “familiar genre,” which voices get drowned out when that genre fiction becomes some of the most commercially successful depictions of Indians, and whose interests are served when the exotic comes in comfortable packaging, murdered Indians become occasions for clever and entertaining problem-solving, and control is symbolically reasserted at the end of each disruption of justice.

We might expect the thesis and antithesis of a dialectic to produce a synthesis, but it is not clear what a synthesis of the “Dialectic of Diversity” might be. Perhaps we can hope for Indian mystery writers and readers to realize more fully just how perspective-bound terms like “exotic” and “assimilated” are. We place such labels on *other* people, or if we think of ourselves as exotic or assimilated, we do so relative to cultural norms in part maintained or revised by popular culture productions like detective novels. When a critic like Royal speaks of “the isolation [Native American culture] has had to endure,” we see how judgments of exoticism or assimilation both bolster a mythical American center from which Others differ to varying degrees. This study should reinforce the notion that the Mystery novel is itself a cultural artifact, a point that gets obscured by the genre's ubiquity in American “popular culture.” Rather than a neutral form, the whodunit promotes values like individual agency and culpability, rationality as the tool for revealing knowable truths, and justice meted out by society’s official or self-appointed avengers. Writers cannot pour any contents—say, for example, “Indian” materials—into the whodunit without its formula shaping the resulting stories.

Well-wrought mysteries with tidy resolutions will always find readers or viewers, but after more than 150 years of whodunit, audiences may be developing a taste for detective fictions without this neat closure. In the lauded suspense movie *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017), for example, one of Chief of Police William Willoughby's several suicide notes cautions Mildred Hayes that crimes like the rape and murder of her daughter are rarely solved: "There are just some cases where you never catch a break. Then five years down the line, some guy hears some other guy braggin' about it in a barroom or a jail cell. The whole thing is wrapped up through sheer stupidity. I hope that might be true for Angela, I really do." Sure enough, several scenes later fired Officer Jason Dixon overhears just such a barroom conversation and engineers a brawl in which he scratches the braggart to obtain DNA evidence. But Mildred and the audience have the expected solution snatched away from them when the suspect has an alibi: he was out of the country on military deployment when Angela was murdered, and the crime remains unsolved. Perhaps the popularity of movies like *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* and the efforts of Indian writers to resist the demands for whodunit will lead to more nuanced and realistic crime stories to balance against the morality tales where an Indian detective *always* collars the perpetrator(s) and guarantees justice.

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