

# **Story as a Weapon in Colonized America**

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(ABSTRACT)

From first contact, Europeans and Euro-Americans have been representing North American indigenous peoples in literature. Non-Indian authors colonized American Indian stories and re-presented them through a Western worldview, which distorted and misrepresented Indian peoples. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's piece, *Song of Hiawatha*, published in 1855 is an early example of this, and Ann Rinaldi's children's book, *My Heart Is on the Ground*, is a contemporary example. However, Indian peoples are not mere victims. Using story as a weapon for "decolonization," American Indian authors have self-re-presented and, through literature, have fought for a more accurate, tribal specific presentation of self to the dominant culture. Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin) authored decolonizing, autobiographical articles and short stories as early as 1901 and collected and published these in her text *American Indian Stories* in 1920. James Welch continued a legacy of tribal specific, American Indian authored literature with his 1986 publication, *Fools Crow*. Both texts work as weapons in the decolonization of American literature.

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# Chapter One

## Colonialism, Literary Tourism, Post-colonialism, and Decolonization

just once  
just long enough  
to snap up the words  
fish-hooked  
from our tongues.  
You think of us now  
when you kneel  
on the earth,  
turn holy  
in a temporary tourism  
of our souls.  
With words  
you paint your faces.  
chew your doeskin,  
touch breast to tree  
as if sharing a mother  
were all it takes,  
could bring  
instant and primal  
of knowledge.  
You think of us only  
when your voice  
wants for roots,  
when you have sat back  
on your heels  
and become primitive.  
You finish your poem  
and go back.

~Wendy Rose, "For the White Poets Who Would Be Indian" (273)

How does something as seemingly benign or even pleasantly beneficial as a story become a "weapon"? And, because it is a weapon, what is its function in both colonization and, subsequently, decolonization? In this introduction, I hope to explain colonization of literature, that is how authors from the dominant culture have appropriated and reworked indigenous peoples' stories and refit them into a Euro-American worldview. In addition, it is necessary to briefly describe post-colonial literary theory and explore why many indigenous literary critics view post-colonial as inadequate

terminology to describe the current American literary scene. Finally, I will address the written response of Native American writers, that is narratives of resistance in a “decolonization” of American literature.

Europeans, and later Euro-Americans, have been writing about Indians from the time of first contact. For hundreds of years, authors from what became the dominant culture represented to the rest of that dominant culture, and in some ways—specifically, in boarding schools—to indigenous peoples themselves, a Euro-American, Christian, capitalist construction of what it meant to be “Indian.” White authors became “literary tourists,” to borrow terminology from Wendy Rose, taking a moment to use what they deemed exotic, primitive, natural, and romantic about Indian culture, putting it in a book, and selling that book. This act put money in their pockets and colonized indigenous peoples’ words and images, consciously or unconsciously forming the image of “Indian” for the general public. This is colonization of and colonization via literature.

Colonization of/via literature is double-edged; it is both an act of and an agent for colonization. When authors from the dominant culture take information from and about indigenous peoples and remake it into a story that creates a comfortable history for the dominant culture—presented both as fiction and, in many cases, as fact—that is an act of colonization. When a reading public digests that information, believes it, and uses it in their thinking about and interactions with indigenous peoples, the information becomes an agent for colonization; that is, it makes colonial thinking and actions (such as using depictions of indigenous peoples as mascots for sports teams) easy and palatable for those who are part of the dominant culture.

Colonization of literature is the taking of a peoples’ own stories and rewriting them into an image that is comfortable and palatable for the dominant culture. It is also, then, feeding this image back to the people from whom the information was appropriated and to the culture at large, thereby altering reality, the lived experience of indigenous peoples, and in effect creating a new “reality” that undermines indigenous peoples’ own self-knowledge and, in turn, a peoples’ own self-worth (as mentioned, most notably during the American Indian boarding school experiences). The reworking of indigenous

peoples stories could be labeled anything from literary tourism to cultural appropriation to literary colonization. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow provides an example with his appropriation of Chippewa stories and the Iroquoian historical figure Hayawentha, which he used in the Americanized form, *Hiawatha*. Longfellow then mixed this information with stories from other Indian nations, stories he may have borrowed from the Finns, and his own version of Christian rhetoric to create his American epic poem *Song of Hiawatha* in 1855. A more recent example is Anne Rinaldi's 1999 children's book, *My Heart Is on the Ground*, written in diary format with enough appearance of historical accuracy to fool a vast majority of nine to twelve year old readers and their teachers into viewing it as factual.

In order to elaborate on the definition of literary colonization, it is important to consider context. According to Louis Owens, "a Native American storyteller or writer [works] within an awareness of traditional, oral American Indian literatures and cultures," (6) and, in addition, "For the traditional storyteller, each story originates with and serves to define the people as a whole, the community" (9). That is, American Indian writers and storytellers create their narratives with the full knowledge of a debt to their ancestors and a responsibility to their children as they produce their own writing. Authors such as Rinaldi and Longfellow do not appear to write with any similar sense of history or responsibility to the people from whom the stories came. Although it is possible that both authors felt a responsibility for historical accuracy which may have derived from a desire to gain the respect of the dominant culture or academic community for whom they wrote, there is a lack of a sense of communal responsibility and thankfulness for being given the stories to tell. Perhaps, however, this is because they were not *given* the stories to tell at all. In addition, that they felt any sort of responsibility at all is highly debatable, for there are times both seem to disregard historical and/or cultural accuracy out of hand

In addition, these white authors lack the sense of responsibility that comes with representing a community. Because they are "outside" and make no or, at best, cursory attempts at stepping "inside," these authors seem to have no responsibility in connecting

to the future. Where in either text is the thought apparent of what effect these texts may have on future generations of both Indian and dominant culture communities? Maybe it can be argued that Longfellow believed he, in a patriarchal and benevolent, grandfatherly way, was helping Indian peoples by preparing a white audience to accept Indians as Christianize-able human beings who, given the time, could “catch up.” If so, his is a sin (to use Christian terminology) of not even attempting to get “inside” and ask Chippewa peoples if this sort of “help” was what they desired. It may be argued that Rinaldi did make an attempt to get “inside”; she did physically make a trip to the Carlisle Boarding School, bringing up the label “literary tourist” in an even more concrete way. However, she visited the site and read texts by Indian authors, most clearly and notably Zitkala-Sa’s *American Indian Stories*, only to take stories and histories and purposefully manipulate them into upholding the ideals of the dominant culture by creating a digestible and false depiction of boarding school life. In places, her text resembles Zitkala-Sa’s so closely that the issue of plagiarism has come up (Slapin, “Literary”). This charge, to my knowledge, has yet to be formally or legally addressed, but it should be. Whether these authors are aware or unaware of the war they are waging, they are part of a group perpetrating acts of cultural appropriation that result in a literary colonization that has gone on for over 500 years.

Longfellow published his piece in 1855; surely, we are much more culturally sensitive now, almost 150 years later. However, Rinaldi published her text in 1999. Clearly, we haven’t had any kind of apocalyptic change in the state of American literature, publishing, or marketing that would expose, alter, or end this presentation of colonized literature, to children especially, in the high volume that it is being put out there. The industry is peopled by authors, agents, printers, booksellers, book buyers, school administrators, and teachers who—knowingly or unknowingly—write, promote, buy, teach, believe in, and continue colonization via literature. As Anna Lee Walters writes, “One needs only to study a bibliography of Native American Literature to confirm that the kinds of things which have appealed to the American publishers on the Native Americans are those works which are ‘safe’ and non-threatening, which do not disturb the status quo of the American society” (35).



Storytelling can be and has become a “weapon” of sorts simply because it has enormous power. Traditionally, indigenous peoples recognize and use the power of story in order to work out conflict and resolution so that a sense of balance can be maintained within and between their own and other societies and cultures. In American Indian stories, tricksters such as Iktomi, Isjinke, and Coyote create conflicts that are then resolved with complex results that are simultaneously positive and negative. Rare is the “happily ever after ending” presented; rather, traditional stories present the complexities of realistic resolutions with layers of “good” and “bad” results for all the characters within each story. Oral stories told for hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years, influence indigenous authors who are now writing down their own stories in the same literary tradition. An example of this is Zitkala-Sa’s short story, “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” published in 1901, in which Zitkala-Sa addresses the problem of the white-controlled boarding school education mis-fitting Indian youths for tribal life. In this story she addresses a contemporary problem and shows the negative conclusion of loss of family but also the positive conclusion of a reconnection to culture for the main character in the end. This story will be discussed in more detail later in this text.

Zitkala-Sa, who wrote and published her works in the late 1800s/early 1900s without the aid of an editor or translator, is an early example of indigenous authors who provide a narrative of resistance in an attempt to counter the overwhelming tide of Euro-American authors who write “Indian” stories. Although the number of published novels by American Indian peoples has been and by percentage still is very small, authors such as Zitkala-Sa and contemporary fiction writer James Welch have been part of the group of indigenous writers whose works are agents, “weapons” if you will, in the “decolonization” of American literature, and therefore of American culture and society. What they and other American Indians are writing provide a voice with which to counter hundreds of years of Euro-American representation of indigenous peoples in literature.

It is apparent that indigenous peoples are aware of this literary colonization and are consciously fighting against it by producing literature for and about themselves (and

in different ways for and about the dominant culture). Some would label this literature “post-colonial”; however, some indigenous peoples reject the idea of a post-modern or post-colonial literary theory applied to their texts, stating mainly that there is nothing “post” about the current *colonized* literary situation today. In her important work *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, addressing indigenous peoples’ concerns, writes,

There can be no ‘postmodern’ for us until we have settled some business of the modern. This does not mean that we do not understand or employ multiple discourses, or act in incredibly contradictory ways, or exercise power ourselves in multiple ways. It means that there is unfinished business, that we are still being colonized (and know it), and that we are still searching for justice. (34)

Smith is a Maori woman from New Zealand, but her experiences can be equated to those of all indigenous peoples who are still fighting against continuing colonization. It is from her that I borrow the term “decolonization” and apply it to American Indian literature.

Louis Owens writes in *Other Destinies*, “Before 1968 only nine novels by American Indian authors had been published” (24). Anna Lee Walters points out that “Very few Indian fiction writers have been accepted by the large publishers to date, or by the intellectual community of that genre. Indian writers on the whole have held an obscure and tenuous place in American Literature until very recently” (35). Despite the caveat “until very recently,” many indigenous writers and literary critics still cannot view the American publishing situation as “post” colonial. Even though most scholars agree that there has been a Native American literary renaissance that began in 1968 with N. Scott Momaday’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel *House Made of Dawn* (Bruchac, “Contemporary” 311), American Indian authors are still battling for space within a publishing industry that is largely controlled by a predominantly white culture, an industry that fully believes in and still upholds a stereotype that was itself created in texts published by the very same industry. Walters writes, “Only since the ‘60s, have a few Indian writers enjoyed successful modest printings in the United States. Large printings

(more than 5000 copies) are extremely rare” (35). It can be argued that it is because of this stereotypical image, created by Euro-American authors and upheld by a similarly populated publishing industry, that Indian-authored texts that rock the stereotype in both form and content are not treated as legitimate offerings. At times, fiction, poetry, biography, and autobiography authored by indigenous peoples are shuffled to the margins as curiosities; from an industry perspective, they are more appropriately placed in “new age” sections or on the shelves with sociology, anthropology, or history rather than with literature. Joseph Bruchac writes,

those works...were generally regarded as something other than “literary.” A sociological curiosity, they [literary works by Indian authors] were worthy of consideration in an anthropology course, but not as an important part of American literature. (That problem still exists today. Although works by a few writers such as Louise Erdrich, Leslie Silko, and Michael Dorris may be found on the poetry and fiction shelves of American bookstores, most works by Native American writers can be found only in the Social Sciences sections—even when those works are books of poetry. Hopi/Miwok poet Wendy Rose has innumerable stories to tell about the times she has found her books only on the Anthropology shelf.) (“Contemporary” 312)

In partnership with the still colonized world of American book publishing are a long and unbroken string of authors wielding stories as weapons in the act of colonization, sometimes knowingly, sometimes merely with good intentions.

If colonization is constant and continuing, and such a thing as “post”-colonialism has not yet come, what is the action being taken right now? My answer is that there is a legacy and continuing momentum of decolonizing literature. Indigenous peoples are using story as a weapon in the war for cultural identity and survival. Even though American Indian authors are writing in the language of the colonizers and are writing in a form, the novel, brought to them by the colonizers, still they are able to more than adequately adapt the new formats to their own narratives in an act of decolonization.

And, in fact, they are not only *able* to write, some believe that they *must*. Joseph Bruchac adds to the argument against the post-colonial label for American Indian literature when he writes,

the current generation of colonized writers is as fluent in the adopted tongue as are the best writers whose roots are solely in European traditions. With American Indian contemporary writing...we have passed the point where that body of literary work can be seen only as a literary curiosity or a mere adjunct to the colonizer's literature. It is, indeed, part of the body of world literature written in English, but it is...also a literature which stands on its own.... Rather than trying to fit Native American literature in as a minor part of the American literary mainstream, it may be more appropriate to see Native American writing as a river in its own right. ("Contemporary" 322)

As Spivak asserts, "Yet, against all straws in the wind, one must write in the hope that it is not a deal done forever, that it is possible to resist from within" (113). American Indian authors are within and at the same time outside of the dominant culture. They attempt the very tenuous act of negotiating both worlds in order to present each his or her own specific indigenous society in literature.

As colonizing literature is perpetrated by a long string of American fiction and non-fiction writers, so is the resistance, decolonizing literature, presented by a small but growing group of published American Indian writers. In contrast to the texts previously mentioned by authors from the dominant culture are the opposing forces wielded by Zitkala-Sa in her collection of *American Indian Stories* and by James Welch in his historical novel *Fools Crow*. Where Rinaldi paints a picture of Indian boarding school that was at times painful but on the whole beneficial for and a step towards the betterment of indigenous peoples, Zitkala-Sa tells a first-hand story showing the breakdown of family and tribal ties caused by the boarding school experience that resulted in an *almost* complete cultural annihilation for those who attended. Where Longfellow advocates cultural assimilation and submission of self to white, Christian society, Welch "is advocating Native American self-responsibility for cultural survival" (Burlingame 5).

These “counter-discourses [are] intended to reclaim self-hood,” a self-hood that is being attacked by the discourses that continually create a colonized image of what it means to be Indian (Williams, abstract).

Writing about narratives of resistance, Guyatri Spivak says that “such narratives are ‘true’ because they mobilize” (112). In the arena of literature, mobilization comes in the form of decolonizing the imagination of the dominant culture. It would be nice to wave a magic wand and do away with all the many volumes of colonial literature offensive and harmful to indigenous peoples. However, I am not one to suggest book banning or book burning (although there are a few authors that I would like to give a good history lesson and then a good talking to. Or, better yet, lock in a room with Vine Deloria, Jr., as long as I got to press my ear against the door and listen in).

Despite the difficulties, it is essential that the work be done to decolonize the on-going wave of what purports to be “Indian” literature but is, instead, literature that works to cement certain stereotypes into the consciousness of the dominant culture. How? Is it enough to say that there is an American Indian literary renaissance and eventually more people will read Indian works by Indians? Probably not. North American indigenous authors are decolonizing the literature offered up to the American/American Indian reading public, or, at the very least, wielding story as a weapon to combat the colonized literature that is constantly, consistently dumped on an American public that is mostly uneducated as far as the accurate portrayal of Indian peoples in literature is concerned. It will take a concerted effort from all factions of those reading and writing and publishing to turn the tide of literary colonization.

In the following chapters, I will compare the two texts written by authors from the dominant, Euro-American culture, *Song of Hiawatha* and *My Heart Is on the Ground*, in order to demonstrate the ongoing literary colonization in American literature. The majority of the chapter is given over to critiquing *Song of Hiawatha* because it is an enormously popular, early example of a colonizing text that works to cement cultural appropriation, misinformation, and specific stereotypes into American literature. In the third chapter, I compare and contrast *My Heart Is on the Ground* with Zitkala-Sa’s

*American Indian Stories* and then follow with a chapter that puts the colonizing text *Song of Hiawatha* beside the decolonizing text of Welch's *Fools Crow*. The four texts were chose for their similarity of subject matter—in the first pair, each provides a detailed description of the boarding school experience, and in the second, each follows the life of a heroic figure—and to show the long history of both literary colonization and decolonization. A discussion of the two Indian-authored texts as examples of ongoing, decolonizing literature is presented in chapter five. The thesis ends with a discussion of the place of white-authored literary criticism, specifically my own, of Indian and non-Indian authored literature about American Indian peoples.

## Chapter Two

### Two Examples of Literary Colonization: 1855 and 1999

It can be argued that comparing Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's romantic, epic poem, *Song of Hiawatha*, to contemporary historical fiction is not entirely fair. Longfellow was writing a romance for an audience that expected romantic, heroic, larger-than-life, fantastical characters. However, it is just that, that he chose to write his romance poem about Indian peoples because they, in his worldview, fit so perfectly as romance characters. He claimed to be writing an authentic representation of indigenous peoples of North America, and his piece was accepted as such. To him and, after his piece was published, even more so to the general American public, Indians were exotic, fantastical objects existing solely in the past in a simpler, more natural world. Humanistic representation was not necessary, no, not even desired.

There is part of me that thinks Longfellow did the best he could, that his intention, however misguided by his patriarchal, Christian missionary attitude, was not to do harm but to help. However, I cannot help but see him as the whirlwind, do-gooder American who *descends* into the *primitive* world of the indigenous folk, paints everything a purifying, choking, pristine white (as a favor to those folks, of course), then spins out and back to his own world, having asked no questions, having listened to no one, secure in his own perceptions and mis-impressions. He then has fodder to write about his experience and feels justified in labeling it "authentic." He is, or can happily see himself as, a positive influence, when in reality he is, at best, a literary tourist. Unfortunately, even this is giving him too much credit.

As far as can be discerned from the literature on his research for *Song of Hiawatha*, Longfellow read a handful of "Indian" books—Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's, most notably. And, he met Kah-ge-ga-gah'bowh, also known as George Copway, a mixed-blood Chippewa (also called Ojibwa or Ojibway) traveling America and Europe on a speaking tour. Those encounters among a handful of others appear to be the basis for his "authentic Indian" story. In the introductory note to the 1966 AMS Press edition of Longfellow's collected works, it is asserted that Longfellow

had seen a few of the straggling remainder of the Algonquins in Maine, and had read Heckewelder while in college; he had witnessed the spectacle of Black Hawk and his Sioux [Black Hawk was in actuality Sauk not Sioux] on Boston Common; and a few years before he had made the acquaintance of the fine tempered Kah-ge-ga-gah'bowh, the Ojibway chief, and had entertained him at his house, trusting not unlikely that he might derive from the Indian some helpful suggestion. (108)

The tone in the introductory note suggests that Longfellow had accumulated a substantial amount of research. Further, it states, "His [Longfellow's] authority for the legends and the material generally of his poem was in the main Schoolcraft's work...and Heckewelder's narrative" (AMS 108). However, because most of this information was second hand or only *possibly* first hand from one member of the Chippewa nation, the stage was set for Longfellow to become a literary tourist and colonize American Indian stories.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's, *Song of Hiawatha* was a major force in the early colonization of Indian literature in that it 1) appropriated stories from a number of Indian nations, 2) for the sake of a "good" story, it conveniently misinformed the general public, and 3) it, consciously or unconsciously, embedded specific American Indian stereotypes into American popular culture. Longfellow's poem was phenomenally popular both nationally and internationally. It was used in grammar school textbooks, and so then became embedded in literature for children. Unfortunately, this legacy of colonization via appropriation, misinformation, and stereotyping is still present today as will be shown using a critique from the *Oyate* website ([www.oyate.org](http://www.oyate.org)) of the 1999 text *My Heart Is on the Ground* by Ann Rinaldi.

In November of 1855 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published *Song of Hiawatha*, a piece that he had been working on for perhaps a year or more and that he had been thinking about for perhaps up to three years before that (Moyne 165). His interest in and sympathy for American Indian peoples was expressed over thirty years previously in 1823 in a letter to his mother that he sent to her while he was attending



Bowdoin College. Longfellow was a man concerned with causes. He spoke and wrote against slavery and was one of the earlier Americans concerned with “the plight of the Indian.” Despite his good intentions, Longfellow was an early example of what Wendy Rose termed literary “tourism”; as a “tourist” Longfellow dipped into Indian literature (oral stories, in Longfellow’s case, mainly from the Chippewa as written down by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft) for a short period of time to enjoy and use what appealed to him. He was a tourist in that he was never truly, nor even it appears made an attempt to be, “inside” the Chippewa culture. He learned what he believed to be truth enough through what he read. Longfellow simultaneously was subject to colonization of literature—in that his image of what it was to be Indian was the “vanishing,” “noble savage” already culturally embedded by the contemporary texts of his time—and was an agent for literary colonization, in that he promoted and secured that image. He is integral in producing what Louis Owens calls “the Indian in today’s world consciousness [that] is a product of literature, history, art, and a product that, as an invention, often bears little resemblance to actual, living Native American people” (4).

Many external forces were at work on Longfellow, which, combined with those at work in him, contributed to the creation of the *Song of Hiawatha*. The Romantic movement was in full swing. Writers of the time were captured by the beauty and mysticism of nature, although perhaps not the reality of it, that they felt was being lost as America expanded. In the article “Hiawatha and Its Predecessors” for the *Philological Quarterly* in October of 1932, Wilbur Schramm writes “In American romanticism probably no single doctrine bulked so large as the idea of natural goodness. Anything in a natural state, said the romanticist, anything stripped of the unnecessary ornamentation with which a human civilization has bedecked it, is good. Man is naturally good, society usually corrupts him” (322). Longfellow was part of the group of writers swept up in this romantic, naturalist tide.

In addition, American writers were also defensive about the quality of their own writing. “American literature” was considered an oxymoron by some of the great literary critics in Europe and in England particularly. The thinking of the time was that a young

country with no real history and no lineage of great literature outside of what was produced in Europe could not claim to have any sort of writing that was valuable beyond the level of mere entertainment. Schramm addresses this as well writing, “In the early years of the nineteenth century it was made extremely clear to American authors that they lacked a long tradition, a remote antiquity” (324). The solution? From Schramm again, “He [an author] could expend his nationalism on an Indian romance,” and “Furthermore, the Indian had been proved to be a commercially desirable subject” (324). With these forces at work, Longfellow wanted to be part of what Robert Berkhofer, Jr. calls in his text *The White Man’s Indian* the “bid to declare intellectual independence from England” (86). Colonizing Indian literature and taking it/making it over in the image of the dominant culture was the easy answer for Longfellow, the literary tourist.

### **Appropriation**

Longfellow felt the pressure to create a truly American epic masterpiece and found the fodder for such a text by appropriating the oral traditions of American Indians. In an 1856 review of *Song of Hiawatha* David Bogue writes, “At length we have an American song by an American singer.... the poetical doctrine of America for the Americans” (75). He goes on to say, “Mr. Longfellow has taken this ancient legend [of Hiawatha] as the basis of his work; he has also woven into the texture of his poem a few other and more original traditions found among the Red race” (75). In letters he writes to his German friend, Ferdinand Freiligrath, shortly after *Hiawatha* was published Longfellow expressed his pleasure at Mr. Bogue’s review (Hatfield 1282).

Longfellow lived in New England for most of his life. From his point of view, despite the fact that there were still Indian nations in that area at that time, “the Indian”—the stereotypical man of nature that had already begun to be considered a “real Indian” in Euro-American eyes—was gone from the landscape. This is what Schramm calls, “a special circumstance that contributed to the vogue: the Indian was vanishing” (323). What made the European-ized, romanticized, invented Indian even more attractive to write about was that he was being safely separated from the growing east coast of America. Writers of the time, including the “Mrs. Webster” Schramm mentions below, were already capitalizing on the trend of writing about this Euro-invented Indian.

Schramm writes, “When his bowstring still twanged in the forest close at hand, he was not heroic; but put him at a distance and, as Mrs. Webster said in her Indian poem, his was “altogether a poetic race’” (323). Almost fifty years later, Berkhofer agrees with Schramm, writing, “commentators have argued that American authors and artists of the Eastern United States only conceived of the Indian as noble after that section of the country had eliminated its Indian problem” (88). It can be conjectured that Longfellow was not much in the company of indigenous peoples because, through his letters, he shows his excitement when he meets “an Ojibway preacher and poet,” George Copway, who had been traveling through the Boston area giving public lectures (Hatfield 1268). Longfellow writes to Ferdinand Freiligrath in June of 1850,

Let me have the pleasure of introducing you to my friend *Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh*, an American Indian Chief of the Ojibway nation, whose English name is George Copway. You will rejoice to take him by the hand, and to talk with him of the grand forests of his native land. I shall make him promise to sing to you some of the mournful musical songs of his nation. (Hatfield 1268)

Longfellow shows how, as early as the mid 1800s, Indian peoples and their cultures are seen, by him and others, as rare novelties connected to the natural environment.

With all these contributing influences, Longfellow sat down to write what he called his “Indian Edda.” He had in mind a story glorifying “the Indian” and showing, through his depiction, that Indians could learn and could embrace both a Christian belief system as well as a Euro-American view of good and evil. Longfellow’s main source for appropriating American Indian stories for his own use was the research writing of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Schoolcraft was married to Jane Johnston, a mixed-blood Chippewa woman; he used his association with her and her Chippewa family members to investigate, collect, and write down many stories from the Chippewa peoples. In fact, Joe Lockard asserts in his piece “The Universal Hiawatha” published in the Winter 2000 issue of *The American Indian Quarterly*, that it was actually her family that provided the stories as well as the oral translations for Schoolcraft’s text.

## Convenient Misinformation

However, Schoolcraft's text was also the source of either direct misinformation or possibly the inspiration for Longfellow's convenient twisting of facts—convenient misinformation—that was acceptable to Longfellow because it fit the needs of his poem. Through the years of literary and anthropological criticism, the accuracies and inaccuracies in Schoolcraft's texts have been debated. Lockard suggests, "That Schoolcraft's text substantially distorted Chippewa beliefs and stories is unquestionable, although he [Schoolcraft] professed a desire to record and publish these to exemplify the Red Man's nobility" (110). But, Lockard doesn't let Longfellow off the hook for his inaccuracies, charging that "Longfellow continued this chain of distortions" by "disregard[ing] the Chippewa name Manabozho and substitut[ing] Hiawatha, an Iroquoian name, because it was more manageable in an English-language poem" (110). Lockard charges Longfellow with "misplacing his faith in Schoolcraft's credibility," and says that Longfellow "viewed Hiawatha as a faithful rendering of tribal stories, and the reading public shared a similar regard" (111). However, Ernest Moyne, writing for the *Southern Folklore Quarterly* in 1965, asserts that Schoolcraft borrowed heavily from J.V.H. Clark's "Notes on the Iroquois" when writing his "congeries of intermingled legends" and thereby was at fault for misleading Longfellow into thinking that Hiawatha (Hayawentha) of the Iroquois and Manabozho of Chippewa stories were one and the same ("Manabozho" 196). The end result, whomever was at fault, was that Longfellow was led to believe that the Chippewa figure Manabozho and the Iroquois statesman Hayawentha/Hiawatha were, at least for the purpose of his poem, interchangeable.

However, Longfellow wrote to his friend Freiligrath, "Hiawatha is Iroquois. I chose it instead of Manabozho (Ojibway) for the sake of euphony. It means 'the *Wise Seer*, or *Prophet*'" (Hatfield 1281). This convenient misinterpretation seems to be inconsequential to Longfellow but others have not felt so nonchalant about it. Thomas Henry, in his book *Wilderness Messiah: The Story of Hiawatha and the Iroquois* published in 1955, writes "there is hardly a trace of identity between the real man and the incongruous mixture of mountain-tossing demigod and love-sick Victorian gentleman, dressed in deerskin and feathers, of Longfellow's poem" (35). For an interesting

discussion on the process of misinterpreted and misrepresented information read Paul Wallace's "The Return of Hiawatha" written for the journal *New York History* back in October of 1948. In addition, literary critic Horatio Hale suggests that identifying Hiawatha with...Manabozho, is like confusing King Alfred with King Arthur and both with Odin" (Wallace 397).

While some of his information was derived from Schoolcraft, Longfellow's form—trochaic tetrameter—and, some have argued, many of the scenes he described were taken directly from the Finnish epic poem *The Kalevala* (also spelled *Kalewala*) written by Elias Lonnrot in 1835. In fact, T.C. Porter, among others, accused Longfellow of outright plagiarism immediately after *Song of Hiawatha* was published (256). Porter writes in an article published in the *Mercersburg Quarterly Review* in 1856,

[W]e ventured to call the attention of the public, in the columns of the *National Intelligencer*, (Nov. 26,) to the similarity, which it bore to Kalewala, and there expressed the opinion that Mr. Longfellow had transferred the form, metre, spirit and some of the most striking incidents of the latter poem to the North American Indians, and hence, that his song of Hiawatha, was not a creation, but an imitation. (256)

Porter asserts that Schoolcraft's text contained "nothing but loose, disjointed, independent, fragmentary legends. There is no relation between them – no such thing as a connected *tale* of Hiawatha and his exploits" (260). He goes on to give side by side comparisons showing that both *Song of Hiawatha* and *The Kalevala* use "mythological personages" for heroes, who lead very similar lives and come to very similar ends as Christianity enters the scene (260-261).

Porter was the first to cast doubt on Longfellow's reliability as a purveyor of "authentic" Indian stories, but he was not the only one. In 1922, Stith Thompson, in a piece called "The Legend of Hiawatha" written for the *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, asserted that Longfellow's poem did "violence both to the original myth and to the spirit of the life which he [Longfellow] depicts" (140). He suggests that Longfellow misused stories that were told for humor with those told during ceremonial

occasions. He also notes, wryly, that the “joining of the departure of his hero [Hiawatha] with the arrival of the white man does not seem to be a part of Indian legend” (137). Then, in 1944, Douglas Leechman, writing for *The Queen’s Quarterly*, echoes Thompson’s concerns that Longfellow’s scenes were, “in some respects, ill-chosen, for [they] led to...a morass of misinterpretation and misinformation” (307-312).

From his letters to Freiligrath, we know that Longfellow brushed contemporary criticisms aside, acknowledging the use of the *Kalevala* for form but emphatically asserting that, despite the similarities, the scenes he wrote about in *Hiawatha* were wholly Indian in origin. He does acknowledge, though, that he used a mix of stories from different Indian nations and adjusted them as he felt necessary to fit the needs of his poem. In addition, he explains the similarities by asserting that Indian poetic meter and Indian story contents parallel those of the Finns (Hatfield 1281+). However, in 1989 in his book *Voices in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*, Arnold Krupat searches for any “possible Indian influence” but concludes that *Song of Hiawatha* “shows no such influence at all” (105). Krupat writes that “*Hiawatha* merely assimilates the Indian to the persisting Euro-centrism of the east” (105), that is, *Song of Hiawatha* colonizes Indian literature, remaking Indian oral stories over into a Euro-American, Christian image.

Longfellow created for himself, then, a convenient literary structure in which inaccuracies and emerging stereotypes could exist, thrive, and solidify. As early as 1903, Indian peoples were rejecting Longfellow’s creation as offensive and inaccurate. In the *Journal of American Folklore*, James Cleland Hamilton uses information collected from an Ottawa Indian named Assikinack (the Blackbird) and writes “that he [Assikinack] did not regard it [*Song of Hiawatha*] as an entirely accurate representation of the life and characteristics of his people, and he felt some jealousy or pique, because of the author calling his hero by the Iroquois appellation, instead of the Algonquin Manabozho. The Iroquois were the ancient enemies of his nation” (233).

## **Stereotypes**

The mythical “noble savage” image was already beginning to emerge in literature and, consequently, in the American conscience. Lockard writes that “Over seventy Indian-based novels appeared in the United States between the War of 1812 and the Civil War,” and that particularly during the 1820s there was a “wave of sentimental writers” (110). The early nineteenth century, writes Lockard, saw “Disappearing braves and dying tribal elders populate these American fictions” and “Heroicized sentimental Indians tended to float heavenward with substantial regularity” (112). But, because it was so popular, widely read, and publicly recited, it was Longfellow’s piece that truly embedded into American popular culture the concepts of “noble savage and “brutal/wild savage,” beautiful but tragic “Indian princess”, and “vanishing Indian.”

Before I give statistics substantiating its popularity, I’d like to briefly discuss the main stereotypes that are popularized by Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha*. Hiawatha himself is the classic “noble savage.” He is forever trotting off to one noble battle or another in “war-gear” or with his “noble war-club” or dressed in his “moccasins of magic” (Longfellow). First, he goes to avenge the death of his mother, then to catch and kill the Sturgeon, King of the Fish, then to kill Megissogwon the Magician to avenge the death of Nokomis’ father. Always savagely and mystically strong in battle, he then is magnanimous in his triumph, reconciling with his father, sharing the flesh of the sturgeon with the seagulls, and sharing the wealth of the magician with all of his people. As Aili Johnson writes in an article for the journal *Michigan History*, celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the poem, Hiawatha was “hailed by a delighted public as a true Indian” (469). In truth, Johnson points out, not only was Longfellow confusing Hiawatha with Manabozho, he also “altered his character [Manabozho] by omitting all cruel and revolting incidents of the original legends” (469). And, Johnson continues, “He added some of the lore we term ‘white man’s legends about Indians’ to round out tales” that would have otherwise “seemed uninteresting to the American reader” (470). “The result” writes Johnson, “of Longfellow’s creative fancy was a charming, romantic poem about Indians” (470). Despite the obvious “noble savage” stereotype that Johnson himself points out, Johnson still, in 1955, calls the stereotyping the “poet’s prerogative” and praises the poem overall.

Hiawatha's friend turned rival, Pau-Puk-Keewis is Longfellow's "brutal savage." Unlike Hiawatha who helps his people and only kills vast quantities of animals for "noble" purposes, Pau-Puk-Keewis takes the peoples' possessions away from them in an all-night gambling session, then for spite kills Hiawatha's pet raven, wrecks Hiawatha's lodge, and kills eagles (called "Hiawatha's chickens") "by the tens and twenties" (Longfellow). For these offenses Hiawatha vows to kill him and does so three different times as Pau-Puk-Keewis shape-shifts from beaver to "brant" to serpent. When he goes back to human form, hiding in "old man mountain," Hiawatha finally does him in for good by harnessing a bolt of lightning from a "tempest" (Longfellow). It is important to note that while Hiawatha is given very Euro-appropriate traits, Pau-Puk-Keewis is the Euro-American version of a "traditional Indian." He knows the "mystic dances" and is the "mischief-maker" and has the ability to change into the shapes of different animals (Longfellow). In other words, through the development and presentation of the two characters, Hiawatha conformed to a Euro-American version of a noble hero and Pau-Puk-Keewis represented an evil adversary, thus making it acceptable to the reading audience of the time for the more Anglo Hiawatha to hunt down and kill the more Indian Pau-Puk-Keewis.

Longfellow's tragic Indian Princess is Minnehaha, daughter of a great Dakota arrow-maker who fashions Hiawatha's arrowheads. When Hiawatha goes to Minnehaha's father to ask for her, she is described as the most beautiful woman of the Dakota people. Like a medieval marriage of royal families, her union with Hiawatha solidifies peace between the Ojibwa and the Dakota. Her beauty and royalty are such that Longfellow has Hiawatha instruct her to dance naked, albeit in the dark of night so that no one can see her, around the cornfield to ensure the good harvest. While Schramm suggests that Longfellow wrote "nothing so real as to shock the gentle reader," Longfellow was apparently not above manipulating the stories in such a way as to titillate his Puritan New England readers. Despite her goodness and beauty, Minnehaha succumbs to the forces of famine and fever and so, tragically, travels "to the land of the Hereafter" (Longfellow).



Minnehaha's death is the last of almost all the main characters in the poem, contributing to the myth of the "vanishing Indian." Other vanishing Indians include Hiawatha's best friend Chibiabos who falls through ice and drowns, although Longfellow describes it as "Like a smoke-wreath wafted sideways,/Slowly vanished Chibiabos" (Longfellow 157). The people never see him again, but he comes back as a ghost and receives the job of watching over the dead. Kwasind is magically drugged and then pelted with pinecones by "envious Little People" of the forest. He falls out of his canoe and is never seen again, but the people are reminded of him when they hear "wintry tempest[s]" rage and roar and the branches of trees groan and break (Longfellow 186). Pau-Puk-Keewis dies as previously described and then Hiawatha changes him into a "great war-eagle," "Chief of Hiawatha's chickens" (Longfellow 180). Minnehaha falls to disease and famine that come curiously before the Europeans come into the scene. Finally, Hiawatha himself, when the "Black-robos" come, hops in his canoe and floats away, vanishing, following Minnehaha's footsteps to "the land of the Hereafter" (Longfellow 220). He leaves with the message to Nokomis that she should make sure that "never harm comes near" the "Priest of Prayer, the Pale-face" (Longfellow 214). He exhorts his people to "Listen to their words of wisdom,/Listen to the truth they tell you," referring to the white people who have come to tell the Ojibwa about Christianity (Longfellow 214+). Thus, the Longfellow-constructed Indian *is* vanishing, but to the reading population of Euro-Americans it is not because of anything Euro-Americans have done. The underlying message is that any responsibility Euro-Americans had for the declining Indian population in the northeast is removed; the Indians are vanishing merely because of unfortunate twists of fate or self-inflicted circumstance. In Longfellow's poem, he even sets the stage for those who remain to "vanish," but it is their Indian-ness that will disappear through Christian assimilation.

The phenomenal popularity of Longfellow's piece puts him above the rest in regards to profiting from the colonization of literature and solidifying the elements of appropriation, convenient misinformation, and stereotyping in American popular culture. The *day* it was published, *Song of Hiawatha* sold all 4000 copies of its first printing. By the end of its first year on the market, it had sold thirty-eight thousand copies (Krupat

104). In 1932, almost 80 years after it was published, Wilbur Schramm called it “*the poem of the American Indian*” (321). It wasn’t popular only in America either. To date, “*Song of Hiawatha* has appeared in some forty-five languages and more than eighty translation editions” (Lockard 110). Well into the 1920s the poem was given the honor of public recitation as well as recitation in the classroom.

How did this then translate into a piece of literature for children? Through textual and anecdotal evidence I have found that the *Song of Hiawatha* and/or portions of it were staples of classroom basal readers in the early to mid 1900s. Students read, memorized, and recited sections of the poem. The mother of a fellow English instructor as well as Virginia Tech’s own literary research librarian both remember reading *Hiawatha* in grammar school readers and reciting the poem in class. Both can still recite parts of it today. They are not alone. George Saintsbury writes in his text, *Prefaces and Essays* published posthumously in 1933, that he was brought up on Longfellow’s works, especially *Hiawatha*. Charles Henning in a 1902 piece calls *Song of Hiawatha* “Among the masterpieces of American literature.... [I]ts charming verses still delight every noble heart and set before our children the example of a man who taught his people the ‘golden rule’ and himself lived the noble life which he wished his tribesman to live” (459). So, it may be concluded that Longfellow’s poem was held up as a moral tale suitable for use in the teaching of American children.

That the misappropriation, convenient misinformation, and stereotypes were there is evident. Also, based on the information presented, the piece held a prominent place in American culture via its inclusion in 20<sup>th</sup> century American grammar school readers. But it is the continuing legacy of colonization of literature in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present that is one of the main reasons that “post-colonial” does not work for American Indian literature. Colonization of literature, especially children’s literature, continues. In studies from the last half of the 1900s on the depiction of American Indian peoples in classroom textbooks, we can see that the literary colonization still persists. In *Textbooks and the American Indian*, published in 1970 by the Indian Historian Press, Inc., Jeanette Henry (Cherokee) and Martina Costo (Cahuilla) addressed the California

State Curriculum Commission of 1965. Referencing that address, Henry writes, “A textbook has no right to be wrong, or to lie, hide the truth, or falsify history, or insult and malign a whole race of people. This is what these textbooks do.... Misinformation, misinterpretation, and misconception – all are found in most of the textbooks. A true picture of the American Indian is entirely lacking” (R. Costo 7). Further in the text, Henry cites ongoing problems of inaccurate data, generalizations, and stereotypes and says that despite the growing clamor there is little actual response towards change (R. Costo 8, 16). In a 1976 study, Barbara Stoodt and Sandra Ignizio write “The noteworthy books are overshadowed by the many inaccurate accounts of Indian life. Realistic portrayal of the American Indian in children’s books is a goal for the future, but it is infrequent in present books” (17). In a 1979 bibliography entitled *Literature By and About the American Indian*, Montana H.R. Walking Bull writes in her forward,

Stereotypes are found in some of the writings of non-Indian authors, and some of these are biased and derogatory. We would hope for literature free of this bias, but this may be a long time in coming.

Ignorance is evident in some of the literature, and there are reasons for this ignorance. American Indian literature and history have been notably missing from the reading fare of American children and youth. (Stensland x)

However, even in 1979, Walking Bull was hopeful that the National Council of Teachers of English was bringing about a change via the 1978 resolution that promoted Native American literature, as well as adequate preparation for teachers to teach Native American literature (Stensland x). Anna Lee Stensland, editor of that same bibliography, adds in her preface to it that teachers are requesting books to use in their classrooms that “deal honestly with Indian life” (Stensland xi). Her text is an attempt to help teachers towards that goal. Despite the positive trend that both Walking Bull and Stensland hoped for and partially see, Stensland remarks on the continuing stereotypes, making direct reference to Hiawatha as a source for the noble savage, Minnehaha as an early example of Indian princess, and the poem in general as representative of the notion of “vanishing race” (Stensland xi).

In a pamphlet called “Characters in Textbooks” written for the United States Commission on Civil Rights in 1980, researchers trace the history of misrepresentation from 1949 to 1980. In the 1949 study, they conclude that Indian peoples are portrayed as either cruel or noble. The title of the 1965 study, the “All White World of Children’s Literature,” seems self-explanatory, and publishers of that time are accused of administering a “cultural lobotomy” to texts (“Characters” 2). In the early 1970s there appears to be an attempt towards multicultural representation, but researchers conclude that the attempt was more or less to simply color the faces of characters brown (“Characters” 3). Finally, researchers acknowledge a move towards accurate portrayal of minorities via the “Fair Textbooks” bibliography published by the same institution, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, in 1979. However, in response to a study at about the same time by researchers Gwyneth Britton and Margaret Lumpkin, “Fair Textbook” authors, conclude, “Despite the existence of such resources [such as the bibliography], there is evidence that textbook biases persist” (3).

Many guides and bibliographies, from the early 1970s to the present, list culturally accurate texts. One from Coos County, Oregon published in 1993 has as its aim to “dispel the stereotypes of American Indians that humiliate and degrade the real Indian culture and add fuel to the fire of racism and prejudice” (Stutzman). The guide asserts that primary and secondary textbooks still reinforce the prevailing stereotypes. It would be nice to assume that this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and surely with the increase of cultural awareness, knowledge, research in post-colonial literary criticism and an increase of decolonizing, Indian-authored literature, the ripples from the very large pebble that Mr. Longfellow dropped into the lake of children’s literature have faded away. Such is not the case. In addition to literature anthologies, elementary school teachers use trade texts such as those offered by the Scholastic Books Company. Unfortunately, Scholastic provides what at this point is a fairly well known example of how the ideas presented almost 150 years ago by Longfellow continue to plague children’s literature today.

In 1999, Scholastic’s division, the Dear America Series, published a fictional diary written by a Euro-American author, Ann Rinaldi. That novel, *My Heart Is on the*

*Ground*, is a contemporary example by a dominant culture author who has taken a historical experience and a number of historical events and rewritten them into the comfortable history that is palatable and familiar to a general American public. It is a text geared towards nine through twelve-year-old children; however, it is also geared towards the adult population teaching those children, as it is published by Scholastic Books, Inc. and marketed to elementary and middle schools. If we look at colonization of literature as a way of colonization via literature, i.e. a way of using literature to control an indigenous population and take what is deemed valuable from that population, then we must examine what it does to the colonized population and what it does to an unknowing general public. By colonizing the Indian boarding school story and feeding an altered history to mainstream elementary and middle school children, Rinaldi's text maintains a stereotype that Indian children (and adults) have to battle against, and it creates in the imaginations of children (who will grow to be adults and will assimilate this misinformation) a dominant culture paradigm that they tend to think of as "natural." That is, from the example of Rinaldi's text, the boarding school experience was tough for Indian children, but in the end it was worth it because it was good for them to join the "civilized" world.

In a review of Rinaldi's book, a group of women who came together to write for the *Oyate* website—Marlene Atleo, Naomi Caldwell, Barbara Landis, Jean Mendoza, Deborah Miranda, Debbie Reese, LaVera Rose, Beverly Slapin and Cynthia Smith—expressed their concerns for Rinaldi's appropriation, misinformation, and stereotyping. Rinaldi's offenses are eerily similar to Longfellow's. All of the following information is either quoted directly from the *Oyate* review or is a close paraphrasing of it. I am indebted to these women for their research and influence. What follows is a somewhat cursory discussion of the text. A more full explication including specific aspects of literary colonization occurs in Chapter Three.

In *My Heart Is on the Ground*, the authors of the *Oyate* review write that Rinaldi "has taken this appropriation of Native lives and stories one step further. That she would take the names of real Native children from gravestones and make up experiences to go

with them is the coldest kind of appropriation” (Atleo et al.). Also from the review, they write that the very title of the fictional diary is appropriated from “a Cheyenne proverb that goes, ‘A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors nor how strong their weapons’” (Atleo et al.). Rather than use it to show, as the quote is meant to, total defeat, “the death of a way of life,” Rinaldi’s “child protagonist...uses the phrase ‘my heart is on the ground’ whenever she happens to feel sad or upset” (Atleo et al.).

The fictional diary is rife with convenient misinformation as well. The reviewers write, “Factual errors abound here; they are on nearly every page” (Atleo et al.). One of the most glaring misrepresentations of history occurs when Spotted Tail visits the Carlisle Indian Boarding School. The historically accurate view of his visit is that Spotted Tail finds his sons “unhappy, in military uniform, drilling with rifles, [and] he [then] insisted that they return with him to Rosebud” (Atleo et al.). Not only did the children of Spotted Tail want to go back with him “there were indications that a general stampede for the train might take place” from all the Indian students who wanted to leave the school and return with him (Atleo et al.). However, in Rinaldi’s version of the incident, Nannie Little Rose writes that her friend Red Road, Spotted Tail’s daughter, tells her, “My brother Max wants to stay.... So do most of the Sioux children. Except your brother. I will try to talk with my father and get him to let the Sioux children stay” (117). And, when Spotted Tail does take his children, Rinaldi, in Nannie Little Rose’s diary voice, writes, “Spotted Tail has returned from Carlisle and gathered forth his children for the trip home.... We all knew Max and his three brothers did not wish to go, not even Paul. There was much screaming and crying.... Spotted Tail made them take off their citizen’s clothing and put on their blanket clothing. He had to drag Max into the wagon” (121). Clearly, Rinaldi has ignored accurate historical fact and has rewritten the information into a “good” story that, not coincidentally, soothes the Euro-American conscience about the boarding school experience.

Finally, *My Heart Is on the Ground* contains the ubiquitous stereotypes that are painful, but unfortunately not surprising. Nannie Little Rose has a brother, Whiteshield,

who rebels against the cultural genocide that the school attempts to force on him. In protest, he does what Rinaldi describes as a traditional dance in front of the school. He is Rinaldi's "brutal savage" much as Pua-Puk-Keewis was Longfellow's; both are depicted as the traditional Indian. In her diary, Nannie chastises her brother because he won't adapt to the white ways. Eventually, though, he too, "vanishes." Whereas Pau-Puk-Keewis is killed off by Longfellow, Rinaldi has Whiteshield repent and assimilate. In Rinaldi's rendition, Whiteshield accepts the white boarding school as the "better" place to be. He runs away from the school and back to his band but returns looking like "half blanket Indian and half whipped dog" according to his sister's account (Rinaldi 161). She reports that he feels "ashamed for running away" and leaves their people to return to the school because their "grandfather is dying... but he wanted Whiteshield to return to school" (Rinaldi 161).

Nannie has a friend, Pretty Eagle, who is Rinaldi's tragic Indian princess. Pretty Eagle goes into what is depicted as a traditional Indian trance. Because the white people do not understand that she is only in a trance, they think that she is dead and bury her alive. Like Minnehaha, Pretty Eagle dies a horrible death, but the reader places no real blame on the white people because they do not kill Pretty Eagle on purpose. In fact, in the novel Nannie blames herself for not being there to save her friend.

The child protagonist, Nannie Little Rose, is Rinaldi's "noble savage" who learns to read and write and plans at the end of the novel to bring the white ways to her people, very much like Hiawatha issuing the command to his people to "Listen to their words of wisdom/ Listen to the truth they tell you," referring to the white priests (Longfellow 214). Like Longfellow 150 years earlier, Rinaldi may have "unknowingly mimic[ed] misconceptions or stereotypes inherent in the research material... 'whitewash[ing]' history to make the non-Native audience more comfortable with issues like stolen land and forced assimilation" (Atleo et al.). However, there are certain Indian and non-Indian reviewers who feel that Rinaldi's act of literary colonization was not practiced "unknowingly."

Fortunately, books such as Rinaldi's are not the only literature of and about American Indian culture written for children. Many American Indian writers are being published, and organizations like *Oyate* are springing up to help concerned teachers and parents choose historically and culturally accurate texts. *Oyate's* recommended book list is extensive and the books and teacher resource guides are made available from their website. In addition, anecdotal evidence from Frieda Bostian, a retired English instructor who reviews children's literature professionally, suggests that more nation specific texts are being produced. She recently reviewed a collection of Indian nation specific readers for young children published by Checkerboard Social Studies Library and edited and illustrated by American Indian writers and artists.

Ideas and attitudes that we have as adults are largely formed by the stories that we hear as children, which are reiterated and then reverberate in our adult lives. As early as 1927 American Indian peoples were speaking out against appropriation, misrepresentation, and stereotyping. In their message to the mayor of Chicago on December 1, 1927, the Grand Council Fire of American Indians recognized the damage inaccurate stories could do to both Indian and non-Indian peoples and so challenged the messages textbooks were sending. The authors wrote, "The Indian has long been hurt by these unfair books. We ask only that our story be told in fairness" (Gililand 14-15). With the increase in Indian authored texts decolonizing the American literary scene in both adult and children's literature, the story is beginning to "be told in fairness."



### Chapter Three

## **Anne Rinaldi's *My Heart Is on the Ground* as literary colonization of Zitkala-Sa's *American Indian Stories***

From first contact, Europeans—initially the travelers and adventurers—began representing indigenous peoples in writing for other Europeans (Smith 8). These Euro writers filtered Indian reality through their own perceptions and worldviews and came up with a representation that was comfortable for themselves and for the people back home. Not having access to the written medium used by the colonizers at first contact, indigenous peoples initially created/represented themselves orally only to those Europeans present among them. They did this by telling their stories, just as we all create and represent ourselves to each other through our stories. Therefore, at the outset indigenous peoples did not have a voice in the Euro-created representation of themselves to the general European public. This Euro representation would become the created “reality” for the white, Christian, Euro-American, dominant culture. Literary misrepresentation, like so many other injustices perpetrated by Europeans and then Euro-Americans, is a legacy lasting into present day. Stories authored by members of the dominant culture about indigenous peoples have created a “reality”—that is an appropriation, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of indigenous peoples in written texts—and have become one of the many battlefields on which indigenous peoples are forced to wage war for the continuation of their lives and culture.

What I am writing about here is colonization of a variety of peoples via colonization of their literature. What does this mean? What is problematic about telling stories about the people one encounters or re-telling the stories that those people choose to share? Colonization via literature is more than that. Given, when two cultures meet, each will represent the other in such a way that each is filtered through the other's worldview. Human beings cannot ever fully escape the social formation acquired from the culture in which they were raised. However, when representatives or members of one culture continually misrepresent, knowingly or unknowingly, another culture in literature (or in any other medium for that matter) and in turn “deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence...to the right of self-determination, [and] to the survival of

[their] languages and forms of cultural knowledge” by creating a stereotypic image within the consciousness of the dominant culture, then indigenous peoples are forced to fight for existence, self-determination, and culture by turning the dominant culture’s language into their own (indigenous peoples’) weapon (Smith 1).

However, prior to discussing indigenous peoples use of traditional story, delivered in the dominant language as a weapon of resistance, it is important to go further into how the dominant culture’s appropriation and misuse of traditional story and history constructs the idea of what it is to be “Indian,” how that idea permeates the consciousness of the general public, and the implications of this particular variety of colonization. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes in her introduction to *Decolonizing Methodologies* that the “significance of travellers’ tales and adventurers’ adventures is that they represented the Other to a general audience back in Europe which became fixed in the milieu of cultural ideas. Images of the ‘cannibal’ chief, the ‘red’ Indian, the ‘witch’ doctor, or the tattooed and shrunken’ head, and stories which told of savagery and primitivism, generated further interest, and therefore further opportunities, to represent the Other again” (8). Smith is writing primarily about the implications of imperialism in the area of anthropological research studying her native people (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou) in New Zealand. However, her statements easily apply to the implications of imperialism in the area of literary representation of the native peoples of North America, namely, in respect to this chapter, the Dakota (or, in colonizers’ terms, Sioux).

According to Robert Berkhofer in his text *The White Man’s Indian*, early written representations depicted North American indigenous peoples as noble savages or wild savages, and, looking at contemporary movies such as *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *Pocahontas*, etc. and books such as the still popular *Peter Pan*, produced by Euro-Americans, those representations still permeate the consciousness of popular culture today. What is the harm of it? Why should it upset Indian peoples if whites are creating fake Indians for other whites to enjoy? Joel Monture, in discussing appropriation of culture in the realm of American Indian art, writes “an individual can observe this activity and shake his head while walking away from it...[but] shaking one’s head is not

enough” (115). There is inherent danger in allowing painful, blatant misrepresentation of culture to happen. Again, I go to Smith; she writes, quoting post-colonial theorist Edward Said:

This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, *back to those who have been colonized*. Edward Said refers to this process as a Western discourse about the Other which is supported by ‘institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, *imagery*, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles’ .... [T]his process has worked partly because of the constant interchange between the scholarly and the *imaginative construction of ideas*.... In these acts both the formal scholarly pursuits of knowledge and the informal, imaginative, anecdotal constructions of the Other are intertwined with each other.... (1-2, emphasis mine)

So, this addresses the fact that the Other is constructed by the colonizers through a variety of mediums and at a variety of levels, including the medium of “imagery” and the “imaginative construction of ideas,” and then is delivered back to the colonized. However, to what end? What is the result of the colonized being inundated with the colonizers distorted view? Smith sees this as crucial to her rationalization for writing about the dangers of research about indigenous New Zealanders by those outside of the Maori culture; I find what she writes crucial to my rationalization for my own investigation about dominant culture-authored texts in comparison and contrast to Indian-authored texts. The examples of white-authored texts discussed previously, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *Peter Pan*, etc. are created primarily for children. This is, I believe, when and where racial stereotypes do the most damage, introducing and embedding these images into the minds of children who then become unconsciously racist adults.

Returning to the discussion of the negative impact of this misrepresentative literature on colonized peoples, Smith states:

Whilst indigenous communities have quite valid fears about the further loss of intellectual and cultural knowledges...many indigenous communities continue to live within political and social conditions that perpetuate extreme levels of poverty, chronic ill health and poor educational opportunities.... While they live like this they are constantly fed messages about their worthlessness, laziness, dependence and lack of 'higher' order human qualities. This applies as much to indigenous communities in First World nations as it does to indigenous communities in developing countries. (3-4)

The implications of colonization via literature are the same as any other implications of war: people are hurt and some people die.

What is it then, that opposes colonization by way of literary (mis)representation? Authentic (a troublesome word) self-determination and self-creation in the consciousness of the dominant *and* minority cultures in the form of indigenous-authored literature is what some Indian peoples choose as a weapon of resistance against white attempts at defining and objectifying the North American indigenous population. Indian-authored texts are not new. As early as 1772, with the sermon preached at the execution of Moses Paul by Samson Occom (Mohigan), Indian voice has been present in American literature (Purdy 620). Writers, particularly Indian women, took up the challenge to fight for the survival of their peoples by authoring their own stories. In an article about five native women who were writing at the turn of the twentieth century, A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff writes, "Undoubtedly, these authors and Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), who wrote fiction and nonfiction in the early twentieth century, were stirred to write by events and issues that affected Indians in that period. Indian hopes to resist white domination through force of arms or the messianic Ghost Dance religion ended with" great losses during a number of battles in the late 1880s through to the massacre of "Big Foot's band of Ghost Dancers at Wounded Knee" in 1890 (90). These writers, educated in the white man's Indian boarding schools, took one of the tools of colonization—literacy—and turned it into their own form of resistance against further infiltration into and appropriation of indigenous culture.

What are the implications of Indian peoples authoring themselves into the consciousness of the dominant culture? It is an opportunity to be warriors in the battle of destroying what Vine Deloria Jr. calls the “old comfortable fictions” dumped on the general public by white authors (66). Deloria writes, “For most of five centuries whites have had unrestricted power to describe Indians in any way they choose. Indians were simply not connected to the organs of propaganda so that they could respond to the manner in which whites described them” (66). However, there were and are Indian writers who have fought to “recover ground unnecessarily lost during the preceding five centuries” (Deloria 66). In an article titled “Comfortable Fictions and the Struggle for Turf,” Deloria describes this as “the struggle for authority and control of definitions” (68). In his explanation he, with biting sarcasm, asks the question, “Should Indians be allowed to present their side of the story, or will helpful and knowing whites be the Indian spokespeople?”(68) He continues with what he presumes is the answer from the dominant culture academician: “Thus Tooker expects to be heard in lieu of the traditional Six Nations chiefs because, after all, she has studied the Six Nations and therefore is entitled to represent them before the public and any other interested parties” (68). Thus, the implications of texts written by Indian authors is that Indians are wresting the weapon of language and literature out of the hands of whites and are creating an authentic, *uncomfortable* for the dominant culture, projection of self.

An important aside to this, although too complex to be fully discussed in this text, is who is listening? Smith recognizes this part of the equation as well. In her concern about the problem of indigenous intellectuals “being taken seriously” she quotes post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak, who writes “For me, the question ‘Who should speak?’ is less crucial than ‘Who will listen?’.... I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of benevolent imperialism” (71). In the context of this chapter looking at the two representative texts, this becomes a very important question and statement. I contend that it is white author Anne Rinaldi who pre-teens and middle school teachers listen to seriously, despite the fact that she is writing about the Indian boarding school experience over 100 years after the fact and from the position of merely having read about it and

having visited Carlisle. Her portrayal of “Indian-ness” and the pleasant assimilation by Indians into mainstream American culture at the Carlisle school fits with students’ and teachers’ already inculcated comfortable view of history. Zitkala-Sa’s much more troubling rendition of the boarding school experience, although truly lived, does not fit the comfortable history. It is the authentic uncomfortable that is ignored and/or rejected.

What purpose can be served by putting Zitkala-Sa’s 1900s, autobiographical text in conversation with a piece of white-authored, contemporary fiction for children? The resulting dialogue will show, in a painful and all-too-familiar way, how deeply the Euro-American, stereotypic, Indian image is entrenched in the psyche of the popular culture and, much more disappointingly, it will show how that lie is perpetuated.

When Anne Rinaldi’s book came out, it was welcomed with rave reviews from teachers, librarians, and children’s book reviewers. In the April 1999 issue of the *School Library Journal: For Children’s, Young Adult & School Librarians*, Faith Brautigam of the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin Illinois writes about *My Heart Is on the Ground* that, “readers follow a remarkably resilient girl [Nannie Little Rose]...trying to find a place for herself in a rapidly changing world.... Captain Pratt...provides vocational training and field trips, and responds to his students as true individuals” (141). In addition Brautigam writes, “Rinaldi depicts widely divergent cultures with clarity and compassion.... The period, the setting, and Nannie herself all come to life. An excellent addition to a popular series” (141). Clearly, this review shows that Brautigam believes in a historically comfortable portrayal of both Richard Henry Pratt and the assimilationist policies he perpetrated. Indian-authored reviews showed that not everyone was so pleased with Rinaldi’s historically comfortable fiction. In an email correspondence, Beverly Slapin, author and one of the founding members of *Oyate*, an organization reading and rating children’s books with American Indian characters and themes, writes:

There are very few “mistakes” in this book. I think that Rinaldi’s writing is purposeful and her agenda is racist. In writing this book, and in Scholastic’s publishing it and continuing to market it, Rinaldi perpetuates the doctrine of manifest destiny and the feel-good mythology that this

country did what it had to do—‘kill the Indian and save the man,’ as...Pratt often stated. Now, another generation of non-Native kids and their teachers will believe this lie, and another generation of Native kids will have to deal with it. If Rinaldi—or we—were to correct every wrong thing in this book, there would be nothing left of it. (Slapin “Re:Thanks”)

Slapin’s commentary is, I believe, representative of the Indian indignation at the publication of this text. As previously stated, she and Marlene Atleo (Nuu-chah-nulth), Naomi Caldwell (Ramapough), Barb Landis, Jean Mendoza, Deborah Miranda (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen), Debbie Reese (Nambè), LaVera Rose (Lakota), and Cynthia Smith (Creek), Indian and non-Indian women, came together to write an historically and academically accurate, very in-depth review of *My Heart Is on the Ground*. As Monture asserted, simply shaking their heads and walking away was not enough. In fact, in the review they write, “We do this for our children and grandchildren – Elizabeth, Carlos, Will, Michael, Michele, Stephanie, Miranda, Danny, Robert, Aimee, William, Thomas, Terri, Jamal, Kiana, Rose, Brittany, Shelena, Noah, Kevin, Tyson, Tara, Alexandria – and for their children and the next seven generations” (Atleo et al.).

Before I had read either text, I decided to pair them together because of the similarity in their topics. Rinaldi’s book *My Heart Is on the Ground* is a fictional depiction of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School experience written in diary form for a 9- to 12-year-old audience. It begins, ostensibly, on December 1, 1879 and includes entries about daily life at the school and remembrances of life before the lead character, Nannie Little Rose, goes to the school. It ends with a fictitious epilogue of what happened to Nannie after her graduation from the Carlisle school, tracing her life through to age 85 and making up stories about her fictitious children and grandchildren. Zitkala-Sa’s text, *American Indian Stories* begins with a collection of four autobiographical pieces called, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” “The School Days of an Indian Girl,” “An Indian Teacher Among Indians,” and “The Great Spirit” (formerly “Why I Am a Pagan”). These first three texts tell of Zitkala-Sa’s life before, during, and after her boarding school experience. They appeared originally “in *Harpers* and in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1900 and 1901” (Fisher v). The fourth essay, rewritten from the original article “Why I

Am a Pagan” which was first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in December 1902, is a reflection on her experience and an affirmation of her roots as a Yankton Dakota.

What I did not realize when I first started investigating was not only were the topics similar, but the details depicted were as well: similar to the point of plagiarism on the part of Rinaldi. I was prepared to find an inaccurate portrayal of the boarding school experience; I had read the *Oyate* review in which “a research specialist on the Carlisle Indian Industrial School,” Barb Landis, “felt it was an outrageous depiction of a tragic period in Native American history” (Atleo et al.). What I was not prepared for was how Rinaldi blatantly took specific historical incidents and specific scenes directly from Zitkala-Sa’s text and rewrote them to create a “history” that is comfortable for the dominant culture. In the scenes that Rinaldi appropriates and rewrites, some are easily traceable to specific parts Zitkala-Sa’s life and writing. Other scenes that are more general descriptions could possibly have been taken as well. From what is contained in her book, there is no doubt that Rinaldi read and plagiarized Zitkala-Sa.

To relate all of the offensive scenes from the text and refute them all with depictions from Zitkala-Sa would take a dissertation-length paper. For the sake of brevity, I will stick to those most egregious offenses including: specific acts of plagiarism, the warping of specific depictions in order to create a comfortable history, the depiction of education/literacy purely as a source of self-affirmation and salvation rather than a problematic tool for forced assimilation into white culture and alienation from indigenous peoples, the positive depictions of Richard Henry Pratt, the blaming of Indian peoples for their own loss of land, and the trivialization of Indian spirituality.

In Rinaldi’s *My Heart Is on the Ground*, Nannie begins her “die-eerie,” in broken English, at the request of her teacher “Missus Camp Bell.” As she very quickly becomes better at writing, her teacher asks her to write about her experiences before coming to the school. Nannie writes that her friend Red Road tells her, “You will see great trees with red apples. You will ride on the iron horse,” if she agrees to go to the school (Rinaldi 27). In Zitkala-Sa’s essay “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” she writes that an



interpreter for the visiting missionaries lures her by saying, “Yes, little girl, the nice red apples are for those who pick them; and you will have a ride on the iron horse if you go with these good people” (42). The similarity is evident; the implications of the appropriation need a bit of explanation. In Zitkala-Sa’s text, she uses the imagery of the *white* missionaries luring her away from the Eden of her childhood existence with the offer of “nice red apples.” She turns their own Biblical preaching back on them by eliciting the analogy of the snake (white missionaries) luring Eve (Zitkala-Sa) into taking the apple and thereby losing her spot in Eden (the Yankton Dakota homeland). Zitkala-Sa goes with the missionaries despite the misgivings of her mother thus taking responsibility for leaving, but only because of the enticements offered to her as a small child by the white missionaries. However, in Rinaldi’s rendition it is *Red Road*, a woman who Nannie regards like a mother, who *convinces* Nannie to go to the Carlisle school with the promise of apples and a trip on the iron horse, thus shifting responsibility from white missionaries to Indian peoples themselves for manipulating Indian children into going to assimilationist boarding schools.

This is not the only similarity between the wording in the two texts, nor is it the only disparity between the messages. Parts of Nannie’s trip on the train are extremely similar to Zitkala-Sa’s descriptions. In addition, there are depictions of life at the boarding school written by Rinaldi that are recognizable from the writings of Zitkala-Sa. In each similar scene, Zitkala-Sa is using her description to criticize the boarding school system, and Rinaldi takes each one and rewrites it in either a neutral or even positive image of boarding school life. An example of this is Zitkala-Sa mashing turnips for the evening meal and Rinaldi’s rewriting of the same scene. Zitkala-Sa writes:

One day I was called in from my play for some misconduct.... I was sent into the kitchen to mash the turnips for dinner.... I hated turnips, and their odor which came from the brown jar was offensive to me. With fire in my heart, I took the wooden tool that the paleface woman held out to me. I stood upon the step, and, grasping the handle with both hands, I bent in hot rage over the turnips. I worked my vengeance upon them.... I renewed my energy; and as I sent the masher into the bottom of the jar, I

felt a satisfying sensation that the weight of my body had gone into it.... I stood fearless and angry. [The paleface woman] placed her red hands upon the rim of the jar.... But lo! the pulpy contents fell through the crumbled bottom to the floor.... I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me. (59-61)

In contrast, Rinaldi writes that Nannie is angry not with the white schoolteachers but with another fellow classmate, Belle Rain Water. Nannie writes in her diary, "Today I was so angry, I drove my wooden spoon through the bottom of a jar of turnips. At our table we had no turnips for supper. Everyone likes turnips. I feel bad that I did this thing" (88). Obviously this is plagiarism, and, by moving the object of the anger from the white authority figures to a fellow Indian classmate, Rinaldi is once again removing responsibility for emotional distress from the shoulders of the dominant culture and placing it on Indian peoples. Rinaldi re-writes history once again in order to uphold the comfortable lie that the hardships of the boarding school experience were not maliciously perpetrated on Indian peoples by white authorities but were initiated by the Indians themselves.

Historically, children were not only manipulated into leaving their families with lies and false promises, children were taken under the guise of government health and safety regulations or were simply taken. The reviewers from the *Oyate* organization, quoting Alvin Josephy, write,

Many parents were coerced into sending their children to these early schools. Many times, children were kidnapped and sent far away to schools where they were kept for years on end. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan described his procedure for taking the children from their families. He said:

I would...use the Indian police if necessary. I would withhold from [the Indian adults] rations and supplies...and when every other means was exhausted...I would send a troop of United States soldiers, not to seize them, but simply to be present as an expression of the power of the government. Then I would say to

these people, “Put your children in school; and they would do it.”

(Atleo et al.)

In addition, the reviewers point out that Indian peoples went to great lengths to avoid sending their children to the white man’s schools. They cite a situation in which a group of Hopi men in Arizona went to federal prison in Alcatraz rather than send their children to boarding school (Atleo et al.).

This brings up another Rinaldi re-writing that creates the “comfortable history.” It appears from many Indian accounts that families were reluctant to send their children off to these schools. In her text Rinaldi has Nannie write that when she is leaving for the Carlisle Boarding School, “The wagon is very full. All the Sioux now want to send their children. Mister Captain Pratt leave some” (34). And, as previously mentioned, when Spotted Tail comes to visit and wants to take his children home, Rinaldi through Nannie writes that “most of the Sioux children” want to stay (117). When Spotted Tail is told he can only take his own children and not all of the Dakota students, Nannie writes in her diary, “We all knew Max and his three brothers did not wish to go, not even Paul. There was much screaming and crying” (121). The reviewers from the *Oyate* organization point out that this is blatantly falsified, writing, “according to historical accounts, the scene was just the opposite” (Atleo et al.). Quoting Hyde they explain that Spotted Tail found out from a private talk with his sons that they were miserable and had not learned English. He needed “Sioux chiefs and headmen” to get his “four sons, a grandson, a granddaughter and another small boy he claimed as a close relative” out of the school. Pratt was left “guard[ing] the rest of his school, as there were indications that a general stampede for the train might take place” (Atleo et al.). The result is, once again, that Rinaldi’s text solidifies the comfortable, dominant culture view of history, which is that the white society was helping indigenous peoples by offering, free of charge, a wonderful opportunity for education. Her underlying text appears to be that if American Indian peoples accepted the kind offering of the white educators, they could then help their fellow people to assimilate into white culture and be productive, white-like citizens. In contrast, Zitkala-Sa does ultimately use her education to fight, but for Indian rights rather than assimilation. An extended discussion of this point follows later in this chapter.

Rinaldi's depiction of Pratt is also at odds with what Indian accounts tell of his true nature. On many occasions, Rinaldi has Nannie write about Pratt as if he is a benevolent guardian, kindly looking out for the Indians' best interest—reminiscent of the earlier comment from Deloria on Tooker. In Rinaldi's fiction, Pratt writes letters to Washington to get better clothing for the poor Indians who have nothing but hand-me-downs, threatening to “take ex-tra-or-din-ary means” if Washington doesn't comply (Rinaldi 109). In addition, he is depicted as a friendly, father-like figure: on the Fourth of July, “Mr. Captain Pratt ask[ed] some of the boys to help him set off firecrackers” (Rinaldi 109). He even lets Nannie's brother, Whiteshield, help him light them, despite the fact that Whiteshield is rejecting assimilation and even does what Nannie terms “war dances” on the front lawn of the school. He is so caring, in Rinaldi's version, that when a student, Horace Watchful Fox, dies, “Mr. Captain Pratt wanted to bury [him] in a white people's cemetery in town” (43). Not only is this a misrepresentation according to historical accounts of Pratt, it is damaging in that, from Rinaldi's point of view, and from the view of the dominant culture, a white people's cemetery would be infinitely better than the school cemetery, which, in reality was quickly filled with Indian children many of whom “died of illnesses, many died of abuse, and many died of broken hearts” (Atleo et al.).

Early in her diary, Nannie writes that Pratt “asks Spotted Tail for children to take east to the white man's school” (Rinaldi 25). Then she says that Spotted Tail “say[s] no.... [White] people are all thieves and liars. They took all our land.... [N]o Sioux children [will] learn such ways” (Rinaldi 25). Pratt's response, according to Nannie, is to “tell Spotted Tail he is a re-mark-able man.... But that he signed papers with the government and gave the land because he not know better. He not ed-u-cat-ed” (Rinaldi 25). The effect, especially for a nine- to twelve-year-old audience, is to make Pratt sound nice and reasonable and Spotted Tail sound unreasonable, silly, and child-like for not realizing that he could have avoided losing his land if he had only been educated; therefore, from a dominant culture perspective, he had to send his children to boarding school if he wanted to avoid losing more land. However, as proved by the situation of

white settlements on the lands of the Cherokee nation, literacy and white education were no defense against land grabs.

In contrast to Rinaldi's fictional representation of Pratt, the teachers who ran Zitkala-Sa's boarding school were not at all depicted as benevolent parents. When Zitkala-Sa and her friends Judewin and Thowin are caught falling in the snow when they had been told not to, Thowin is taken into a room by one of the women teachers. Thowin only knows the word "no" and so is beaten to the point that "the poor frightened girl shrieked at the top of her voice" each time "no" was not the correct answer, such as when the teacher asks, "Are you going to obey my word the next time?" Finally, when the woman asks, "Are you going to fall in the snow again?" Thowin's one word works, and she is not beaten anymore (Zitkala-Sa 58-59). Zitkala-Sa comments, "During the first two or three seasons misunderstandings as ridiculous as this one of the snow episode frequently took place, bringing unjustifiable frights and punishments into our little lives" (59). Later in her life, Zitkala-Sa came in contact with Pratt himself when she decided to take a job at the Carlisle School. She was quickly disgusted with the way that the school was run and did not stay long. When she had her essay "The Soft-Hearted Sioux" published, he condemned it, saying, "her stories were 'trash' and she 'worse than pagan'" (Welch qtd. in Susag).

In addition to rewriting Pratt into a seemingly nice man bent on helping the Indians through a difficult transition, Rinaldi rewrites history so that Indian illiteracy, rather than white infiltration, bogus treaties, and theft, is to blame for loss of ancestral land. The previously mentioned selection from Nannie's diary—"he [Spotted Tail] signed papers with the government and gave the land because he not know better. He not ed-u-cat-ed"—is just one of many instances where Rinaldi shifts blame and creates a "history" more palatable to the dominant culture (Rinaldi 25). In addition, she writes through Nannie that "In The-Time-That-Was-Before, our chiefs have made large mistake in giving over our lands" (5) and that Nannie will, "Understand their language" because she believes, "If our elders had done this, they would not have signed away the land" (32). Zitkala-Sa, however, is very clear about who is responsible for Indian land loss.

She writes that when she offers to go to the river for water when she is older and big enough to carry it herself, her mother replies, ““If the paleface does not take away from us the river we drink”” (9). Her mother explains further, “We were once very happy. But the paleface has stolen our lands and driven us hither. Having defrauded us of our land, the paleface has forced us away” (10). Zitkala-Sa uses the word “defrauded” to explain the loss of land; however, Rinaldi uses rhetoric to place the blame at the feet of the Indians themselves, manipulating the beliefs of the young, impressionable audience who reads her fiction.

Another particularly egregious manipulation of representation is Rinaldi’s trivialization of Indian spirituality. She attacks spirituality in many ways, but particularly through her depictions of the Sun Dance, her equation of the Christian devil with Indian medicine men, and by killing off the character of Lucy Pretty Eagle in such a way that Lucy’s own spirituality is the reason for her death.

Nannie Little Rose makes references to the Sun Dance many times; the following are the most misrepresentative:

Part of me is missing. I feel like a young warrior in our Sun Dance, who has had the skin near his breasts cut and sticks put in the openings. The sticks are fastened to two ropes and I am left hanging, to show my bravery. (Rinaldi 29)

Miss Monk, who teaches us sewing, said she will send the best ones to the land of Philadelphia to the State Fair. This is like our Sun Dance, only nobody dances. (Rinaldi 78)

[O]ne of Pretty Eagle’s brothers is ailing. He pledged himself in the Sun Dance. He fasted and allowed the wooden skewers to be put through the skin around his shoulders.... Many young men do this every year.... But some also die. And some get sick.... Many young braves have died from this. I am very worried. (Rinaldi 127)

Depictions such as these are inaccurate. The reason for pledging at the Sun Dance is not to show bravery. Rinaldi trivializes a sacred ceremony; the Sun Dance is not a state fair. And, in addition, this is yet another way that Rinaldi shifts blame, this time for the death of “many young braves,” from whites to Indians.

Rinaldi continues to depict Indian spirituality in a trivial manner when she has Nannie write, “We learned about the Devil in Sunday school. I think he is like some of our medicine men. He can change his shape if he wishes” (40). To have an Indian character equate the epitome of evil in the white Christian world with her own Indian spiritual leaders is unforgivably inaccurate, bordering on blatant racism. Coincidentally, Zitkala-Sa also learns about the devil when she is at boarding school. Her reaction, as expected, is quite different. The devil to her is a “white man’s legend” that she hears from a “paleface woman” who tells her that he “roamed loose in the world, and that little girls who disobeyed school regulations were to be tortured by him” (62-63). Consequently, she has a dream that she is at home with her mother and the devil is chasing her. Her mother doesn’t seem to notice and the devil does not frighten her mother because he belongs to the world of whites, and she does not speak that language. Zitkala-Sa runs to her side and is eventually scooped up into her lap; at that instant, the devil disappears because she is now safely Indian again and cannot be bothered by the white man’s devil (Zitkala-Sa 62-64). In Rinaldi’s depiction, the devil is equated with Indian medicine men, reinforcing the stereotype of the “savage red devil.” In Zitkala-Sa’s more accurate depiction, the devil is a white man’s creation that disappears when she is in the safety of her Indian upbringing.

The dream about the devil is representative also of the terrible split that was caused by the boarding school education. In her literature Zitkala-Sa writes against the boarding school system and does not advocate it for her people. Writing for “Voices from the Gaps,” a University of Minnesota website highlighting women writers of color, Melessa Renee Henderson reports that in 1900 Zitkala-Sa,

began publishing articles criticizing the Carlisle Indian School. She resented the degradation students underwent, from forced Christianity to

severe punishment for speaking in native languages. She was criticized for this because many felt she showed no gratitude for the kindness and support that white people had given her in her education. (par. 5)

In the short story “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” she writes about a young Indian boy who goes off to the white boarding school and comes back unable to care for his aging parents because he does not have any of the skills needed to survive. Because of his lack of useful knowledge and because of his alienation from his family and tribe, his people leave him and his father dies of starvation. In his attempt to feed his father by killing a cow belonging to a local white rancher, he kills the rancher and subsequently is put in jail to await his execution. He wonders, at the end of the story, whether he will be greeted by his father or by the white man’s Jesus when he dies. Dexter Fisher in her introduction to the newest edition of *American Indian Stories*, writes that “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” “raises the fundamental question of survival that was to confront all Indians educated off the reservation. What price assimilation?” (ix). In an article for the *Cimarron Review* Vanessa Holford Diana answers, “Clearly, through repetition, Zitkala-Sa shows us that the cost of assimilation is entrapment and isolation and can be death, whether actual or metaphorical” (164).

Zitkala-Sa is clear about the pain that the boarding school experience and the acquisition of literacy affords her. When she returns to her home after three years at the boarding school, she writes, “During this time I seemed to hang in the heart of chaos, beyond the touch or voice of human aid.... This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East” (69). Her misery is not hers alone. She observes, “After an uncertain solitude, I was suddenly aroused by a loud cry piercing the night.... I realized that my unrestrained tears had betrayed my suffering to [my mother], and she was grieving for me” (74).

Nannie does not seem to have the same issues with assimilation. She mentions briefly and occasionally things such as, “we children [should] not forget our people and our ways” (76). But, more so and in more detail, she writes statements such as “it is not wrong to be here, to learn the ways of the white man. Learn their songs, their history,



their artwork, their religion, so we can make our way in the world” (76). As opposed to Zitkala-Sa’s real struggle with identity in two worlds, Nannie Little Rose has an easy handle on it. She writes, “When I first came here I missed home very much. Now I am more at home here. But I have not turned my face from my people. Each day I look in the white people’s mirror in the hall and see that I have not lost my face” (77). In contrast, Zitkala-Sa writes, “Had she known of my worn condition, [my mother] would have said the white man’s papers were not worth the freedom and health I had lost by them.... [I]t would be far too true to be comfortable” (81). The final analysis of the cost derived by the boarding school system is best expressed by Zitkala-Sa in the last few passages of “An Indian Teacher Among Indians.” Disillusioned and far from home she writes:

For the white man’s papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit.  
For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. On account of my mother’s simple view of life, and my lack of any, I gave her up, also. I made no friends among the race of people I loathed. Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends. The natural coat of bark which had protected my oversensitive nature was scraped off to the very quick. (97)

With the instances of blatant and not so blatant plagiarism in mind, it is obvious that Rinaldi read Zitkala-Sa in preparation to write her book. Concluding that she did read it, she must also have read the previous passage. Given this, how can we believe anything except what Beverly Slapin writes—“There are few ‘mistakes’ in this book. I think that Rinaldi’s writing is purposeful and her agenda is racist” (Slapin “Re: Thanks”). Rinaldi didn’t make mistakes; she was purposeful. And, now, just as Slapin suggests, another generation of non-Native kids and their teachers will believe this lie, and another generation of Native kids will have to deal with it” (Slapin “Re: Thanks”).

## Chapter Four

### James Welch's *Fools Crow* as Decolonization of Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*

It has been suggested that pointing out the historical and cultural flaws in Longfellow's and Rinaldi's texts is rather like shooting fish in a barrel. I agree. The problems are obvious and egregious. Why then are we still combating the on-going colonization that literature such as this perpetrates? The answer is that generation upon generation has been subjected to this colonization until it is no longer recognized as such. Instead, the depictions seem natural, true, and irrefutable from a dominant culture perspective. Kathryn W. Shanley notes, in an article for the *Wicazo Sa Review*, "We are up against nearly overwhelming forces when we confront the appropriative and colonizing aspects of...stereotyping and negative depictions...and the usurpation of Native voices in America mainstream literature (past and present)" (34-35). Shanley adds, quoting E. Doyle McCarthy, "Ideologies are absolutizing voices, passing themselves off as natural, as the only way of viewing things" (35). Shanley notes that "McCarthy elaborates, 'all knowledges contain within them the seeds of ideological thinking. But some knowledges, because of their totalizing features and their ability to naturalize social reality, and to reproduce institutions of power, achieve more perfectly the status of ideologies'" (35).

Therefore, colonizing literature such as those pieces written by Longfellow and Rinaldi are agents for and have become a part of the ideology that "reproduces institutions of power," namely the Euro-American literary institution, a power institution that for the most part excludes American Indian voices. This is why it is important to pay close attention to Indian authored texts that do get published and that challenge hundreds of years of literary colonization. Putting James Welch's *Fools Crow* in conversation with Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* shows how *Fools Crow* acts as a weapon for decolonizing American literature and the consciousness of the dominant culture.

Indigenous authored texts decolonize in sometimes obvious and sometimes not so obvious ways. Rarely are American Indian authors responding to one particular text. It

is doubtful that Welch was specifically answering the colonization by Longfellow when he sat down to write *Fools Crow*. To that end, how are the two texts, *Song of Hiawatha* and *Fools Crow*, comparable? Why place a text written in an obscure poetry format by a white author back in 1855 side-by-side with a historical fiction written by a Blackfoot author in 1986? Comparisons such as this must be done because, although they may not be writing in response to particular novels, many American Indian authors write with the conscious knowledge that they are combating hundreds of years of colonization of their stories. The narratives authored by American Indians “disseminate and reassemble knowledge” (Shanley 34).

Both authors create fictional depictions of a time prior to/during the onset of white, Euro-/Euro-American contact and have a heroic (although “heroic” in very different ways) protagonist that carries the story. However, *Fools Crow* decolonizes the colonization exemplified in *Song of Hiawatha* by reinscribing into popular literature what it is to be Indian, specifically Blackfoot Indian. Welch decolonizes in at least three distinct ways: 1) he presents traditional Blackfoot stories to create a distinctly Blackfoot novel, that is, it is tribal specific, 2) he uses real historical figures, tribal specific, accurate settings, and tribal specific historical events, and 3) he peoples his novel with realistic, human characters who have recognizable motivations.

In *Song of Hiawatha*, Longfellow attempts to use what he believed to be “authentic Indian legends” focused on a larger than life, Chippewa Indian that he called Hiawatha in order to create his “American epic.” James Welch uses traditional Blackfoot stories and history to create a historical fiction that is about a very human protagonist, *Fools Crow*. Longfellow begins with very fantastical scenes and, although he mixes them with more “realistic” narrative, maintains a fairytale-like tone that is only enhanced by Hiawatha’s departure: he floats off into the purple sunset in a birch canoe. The setting in *Song of Hiawatha* is mentioned—“On the shores of Gitche Gumee,/Of the shining Big-Sea-Water”—but not with any real importance in the text (Longfellow 91). In *Fools Crow*, the setting is specifically that of the Blackfoot people in 1870. Welch in his narrative and through the voices of his characters is always cognizant of the land, and

where things happen is as essential to the plot as why they happen. Welch uses historical facts and writes into his fiction real historical figures as supporting characters. Both texts can be looked at as coming of age stories, in which the protagonists grow from boyhood to manhood, Hiawatha in such a way that he resembles a flawless romance hero and Fools Crow in a way that seems realistic and prompted by understandable actions and motivations. Perhaps it is this third point of decolonization that is the most important reason for putting these two texts in conversation with one another; discussing this point shows how *Fools Crow* deconstructs the stereotypical “Indian” image that is put forth by *Song of Hiawatha*.

Having shown in chapter two that *Song of Hiawatha* is an agent of literary colonization, I would like to show *Fools Crow* as a text that decolonizes, first specifically in the way that Welch presents traditional stories and weaves in American Indian history. What is Welch decolonizing in this instance? He answers the appropriation and subsequent colonization of many different indigenous stories that Longfellow used to create a Euro-American, “pan-Indian” that “bears little [or no] resemblance to actual, living Native American people” of the time period or of today (Owens 4). Longfellow used Ojibwa stories collected by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and possibly used collections of stories by other anthropologists. In addition, he may have included stories from Finland; the introductory note in the AMS edition of *Song of Hiawatha* addresses this stating that Longfellow “had been reading with great delight the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, and [that] this poem suggested the measure and may well have reminded him also of the Indian legends, which have that likeness to the Finnish that springs from a common intellectual stage of development and a general community of habits and occupation” (107). In addition to presenting evidence of his knowledge of the Finnish work, this introduction, written in 1966, shows the long and enduring effects of literary colonization in that it presents from what is presumed to be an authoritative, academic point of view, the AMS Press, that indigenous peoples are pretty much all the same and all less than civilized.

On top of the research he did, Longfellow superimposed his own Euro-American, Christian cosmology, thus creating out of an amalgamation of second-hand stories a homogenized “pan-Indian” ready to “Listen to [the missionaries’] words of wisdom” and become “civilized” (Longfellow 217). In an article for *Parabola* Joseph Bruchac comments, “There is no reason why non-Indians cannot tell Native American tales—if they approach that telling in the right way” (“Storytelling” 89). However, he points out that, “if a person retells it [a story and...] is not familiar with the message that story is meant to convey, then they may—as far as the story’s traditional purpose goes—destroy the story by leaving out or changing details which they think inconsequential” (“Storytelling” 89). This is what Longfellow did with the stories he retold in order to create *Song of Hiawatha*.

In contrast, James Welch, a Blackfoot, uses Blackfoot stories—tribal specific, traditional stories—to weave together a Blackfoot historical novel. Lori Burlingame writes,

Indeed, it is these stories, some passed down to Welch himself from his great-grandmother and some preserved in historical and ethnographic texts, that have enabled Welch to recreate the traditional world of the Blackfeet in the late nineteenth century and, hence, keep it alive for future generations. (7)

The Seco-mo-muckon story and the story of Feather Woman are two of the most prominent traditional stories that Welch writes into his novel. Yellow Kidney relates the story of Seco-mo-muckon when after Yellow Kidney leaves the Lone Eater’s band and is resting in the winter war lodge; Feather Woman’s story is told for the first time in the novel right before the Sun Dance and then again by Feather Woman herself near the end of it. Both of these are Blackfoot stories that contribute to the overall Blackfoot cosmology presented in the book.

Shanley writes that the goals of American Indian literature are “to express and/or recover American Indian voices, preferably tribal-nation-specific voices, to recover an American Indian past, and to foster American Indian tribal continuance” (34). Focusing first on the story of Seco-mo-muckon the fire keeper, it is an expression of American

Indian voice, Yellow Kidney's within the novel, and, from a broader perspective, Welch's voice as well. It is a tribal specific voice in that it is a Blackfoot tale. And, it both recovers and fosters the continuance of the Blackfoot peoples.

In the novel, Yellow Kidney has chosen to leave the band of the Lone Eaters because he feels as if he is unable to live the life he had before being captured and mutilated (his fingers are all cut off) by the Crow people. In a war lodge where he stops to rest, he remembers "his father's story of Seco-mo-muckon and the firehorn in the long ago" (Welch 238). In it, Seco-mo-muckon is supposed to keep a coal burning so that his people could have fire. As he is traveling to their new camp, he thinks enviously of becoming "keeper of the Medicine Pipe...just as Awunna," a trusted member of the tribe was. Seco-mo-muckon falls asleep and lets the coal die out. When he realizes his error, he makes up a story that brings shame to Awunna, and as a result Awunna puts the Medicine Pipe over the entrance to Seco-mo-muckon's lodge and leaves, never to be seen again (Welch 238-9). As Bruce Murphree points out, the story parallels "the relationship between Fast Horse and Yellow Kidney during the horse stealing party at the Crow camp" (186). During the raid of the Crows, Fast Horse taunts the enemy rather than simply doing his job and keeping an eye out for the others in the party; Murphree calls him "a man driven by recklessness and personal desire" (187). In this way his actions parallel Seco-mo-muckon's who destroys the reputation "of a fellow tribesman" through "carelessness and avarice" (Murphree 187). Fast Horse's actions cause Yellow Kidney to be discovered, captured, and subsequently mutilated. Fast Horse and the rest of the party return to the Lone Eaters camp without knowing what has happened to Yellow Kidney, but Fast Horse does not speak up and take responsibility for what he has done. After his actions are found out, Fast Horse still refuses to accept any blame, telling Fools Crow that Yellow Kidney, "was foolish to take that risk. He caused his own bad luck" (Welch 237). Just as Seco-mo-muckon denies being the one who let the coal die out, Fast Horse denies being the one who caused Yellow Kidney to be caught. Because of this Yellow Kidney leaves his home and family, much like Awunna. In the end, Seco-mo-muckon is struck dead by a lightning bolt thrown down by Thunder Chief and Fast Horse is banished from the Lone Eaters.

The story has meaning both within and outside of the novel. Within the context of the novel, it is important to Yellow Kidney because he recalls it from stories told to him when he was a boy, and it gives him comfort. In addition, it is a vehicle for disseminating Blackfoot self-definition through popular literature for a wider, non-Indian audience reading the novel. According to Murphree, “This old Pikuni lodge tale is...more than a dreamy remembrance that Yellow Kidney soothes himself with after his exile from tribe and family; it underscores the perils of wandering from Pikuni customs and stresses the importance of tribal unity” (187). Welch uses the medium of the novel to retell Seco-mo-muckon’s story not only because it enhances his larger story, but also because he is “disseminating and reassembling” what it means to be Blackfoot in the minds of the general public. The story expresses American Indian voice in a way that is tribal specific, in a way that recovers the right to define self for Blackfoot peoples, and in a way that “fosters continuance” simply by telling the story. Bruchac, speaking of New England native peoples, asserts “stories have sustained them and kept them alive as a people” (“Storytelling” 92). I would suggest that this is also true of Blackfoot people; through story, Welch plays his role in the continuance of his nation.

Another important traditional story that Welch relates is about Feather Woman and Star Boy, explaining many things about the Blackfoot world including how they received the Sun Dance (110-112). It too is an expression of Blackfoot voice and in very distinct and important ways recovers self-definition and fosters the continuance of Blackfoot people. In this story So-at-sa-ki, Feather Woman, marries Morning Star, son of Sun Chief and Night Red Light, and together they have a child, Star Boy. However, Feather Woman digs up the sacred turnip which she was warned against doing by Sun Chief. Her error causes her and Star Boy to be sent back to the earth to live with her people. Although she is happy to be back home, she is unable to bear being parted from her husband. She becomes obsessed with getting back to him to the point that she ignores her people and even her son. “It was not long before Feather Woman died of a broken heart” (Welch 111). Star Boy grows up and through his actions the Pikuni receive the Sun Dance and “the elkskin robe [that is] to be worn by a virtuous medicine woman at the time of the ceremony” (112). This is the way that Ambush Chief related Feather

Woman's tale before the start of the Sun Dance in Chapter 10 of Welch's novel. Close to the end of the novel, Nitsokan, dream helper, directs Fools Crow to go on a journey to a land where he meets Feather Woman. She tells him that she did not die mourning her husband; instead, she was banished to a place not of the living, nor of the dead. Here, she begs for forgiveness every day. She tells Fools Crow that it is because of her transgression that the Blackfoot people suffer, but she also gives him hope that this will not always be the case. Even though it appears to Fools Crow that her situation is hopeless, she says, "One day I will rejoin my husband and son. I will return with them to their lodge and there we will be happy again—and your people will suffer no more" (Welch 352).

According to Lori Burlingame, in the second telling of the story from Feather Woman's perspective in which she takes responsibility for the misfortunes of the Blackfoot people, Welch is writing a "retroactive prophecy" (1). The term "retroactive prophecy," Burlingame explains, was coined by Jarold Ramsey, who defines it as a text in which some action that occurred before contact results in something of consequence that happens with the coming of the whites (1). In the case of Feather Woman, her digging up the turnip results in the disease, loss of land, and brutal massacres perpetrated by whites on the Blackfoot people. In ascribing the blame for the ills brought on by white encroachment to Feather Woman, Burlingame asserts that Welch "reject[s] a legacy of victimization" (2). Instead of portraying the Blackfoot people as victims, Welch "offer[s] empowerment through self-responsibility and cultural awareness and reconnection" (Burlingame 2). This brings up the question how is this any different from what Ann Rinaldi did; both authors place blame on Indian peoples. The resemblance is only surface. In Rinaldi's text, Indians lose land and life because of the "mistakes" of not being literate in English and of not letting go of their traditional Indian-ness. Basically, the underlying message of Rinaldi's text is that what brings about tragedies is the Indian error of not being white. Conversely, in Welch's retelling of the story of Feather Woman and Poia the mistake is not about Indian ways being the cause of tragedy; the mistake is of not listening to the oral history, not heeding ones elders. This is why Feather Woman digs up the turnip; she disregarded the instructions of Sun Chief. In addition, the result is



not the same. In *My Heart Is on the Ground*, the Indians who lost their land are simply out of luck. There is no positive balancing force. However, with Feather Woman, her mistake causes the tragedies, but it also brings the Sun Dance to the people through her son Poia. As in most traditional stories, bad is balanced with good. Finally, in Rinaldi's text blame and responsibility is placed entirely on the Indian peoples. In Welch's, the responsibility for the ills felt by the Blackfoot people is distributed to both white and Indian people.

With the use of the traditional Blackfoot story of Feather Woman, Welch is "reinscribing the past...reclaiming the future and subverting Hollywood and literary stereotypes about the 'vanishing American'" (Burlingame 2). Welch's "re-inscribing" is decolonization; he is re-writing, and in so doing is taking back control of the creation of self-image in literature. In Welch's version, "terrible events of Blackfeet history in the late nineteenth century have their origin in a Blackfeet cosmology.... this affirms the idea that even though their lives are being turned upside down, they are still living in a Blackfeet world.... What Welch is doing is advocating Native American self-responsibility for cultural survival" (Burlingame 4). Welch writes that Feather Woman tells Fools Crow, "Much will be lost to [the Pikuni children].... But they will know the way it was. The stories will be handed down and they will see that their people were proud and lived in accordance with the Below Ones, the Underwater People—and the Above Ones" (359-60). Welch's text is a contemporary example of this; the stories that were told to him by his great-grandmother, a survivor of the Massacre at the Marias, were handed down to him and are being given to his reading audience, contributing to the survival of the Blackfoot people and self-creating a Blackfoot image in literature. Through his use of traditional stories, Welch is decolonizing white-authored literature about American Indians and is using story as the vehicle to change the stereotypical images of North American indigenous peoples that that white-authored literature creates.

In contrast, Longfellow's colonizing text offers Christianization and assimilation, putting Indian survival into the hands of white, Christian missionaries. In the following passage, Hiawatha is getting ready to depart "To the land of the Hereafter"; his wife, best

friends, and friend turned rival, Pau-Puk-Keewis are all dead (220). The only named character left is Nokomis, Hiawatha's grandmother. He says to her,

But these guests [missionaries] I leave behind me,  
In your watch and ward I leave them;  
See that never harm comes near them,  
See that never fear molests them,  
Never danger *nor suspicion*,  
Never want of food and shelter,  
In the lodge of Hiawatha! (216, emphasis mine)

Longfellow has Hiawatha put the missionaries in a position of respect; they are housed in his lodge, and they are to be fed, sheltered and protected. In addition, he tells Nokomis that the missionaries are not to be objects of "suspicion"; it can be assumed that he means that she should not suspect them of harboring ill will. This is key in considering what Hiawatha then tells "the people from the margin," his band of people, just before he launches his canoe and sails off (217). Longfellow writes,

Forth into the village went he,  
Bade farewell to all the warriors,  
Bade farewell to all the young men,  
Spake *persuading*, spake in this wise:  
"I am going, O my people,  
On a long and distant journey;  
Many moons and many winters  
Will have come, and will have vanished,  
Ere I come again to see you.  
But my guests I leave behind me;  
*Listen to their words of wisdom,*  
*Listen to the truth they tell you,*  
For the Master of Life has sent them,  
From the land of light and morning! (216-217, emphasis mine)

So, in a "persuading" voice, Hiawatha tells his people that he is going to be gone for a very long time, later in the poem described as "forever," and that they should listen to

these new-comers because they are wise and truthful. Instead of leaving hope for the future with Indian peoples, he hands over authority, and the power of “words” and “truth,” to white, Christian missionaries.

The second way that Welch decolonizes literature such as that written by Longfellow is by creating a historically accurate setting described in a way that is particularly Blackfoot, using actual events and adding true, historical figures who were present at and part of those events. Most notably, Welch inscribes into *Fools Crow* the Massacre at the Marias, the key people involved in it, and the events that led up to it. From a white perspective, the massacre was called “The Baker Massacre”; General Sheridan ordered Eugene M. Baker to find Mountain Chief’s band of Pikuni and “strike them hard” (Shultz 304). With assistance from mixed-blood scout Joe Kipp, who thought he was leading Baker to Mountain Chief, Baker instead found Heavy Runner’s band. Even though Kipp told Baker that they had found the wrong band, Baker ordered the attack.

In his recording of the event, James Willard Schultz (called Apikuni by the Blackfoot people) includes a letter from historian/librarian Anne McDonnell that states,

The official report from De Trobriand was 120 men killed, 53 women and children, 44 lodges destroyed and 300 horses captured. The report from Vincent Collyer of the Board of Indian Commissioners was 173 killed: 15 fighting men (between 12 and 37 years of age) 90 women and 50 children under 12 years of age.... One cavalry man was killed.

(304-5)

Historically, the events that led up to the massacre were as follows. Owl Child, a Blackfoot, proved himself over time to be a volatile person. Shultz writes that Owl Child disobeyed orders in raiding parties; he lied about a kill and in a rage over the dispute killed Bear Head, a fellow Blackfoot; and he killed Malcolm Clark, a white man, in retaliation for his attempt to steal Owl Child’s wife. It was this last act that spurred the order for attack from General Sheridan. Sheridan’s goal was to find and slaughter Mountain Chief’s band because Owl Child was part of that band. Instead, Heavy

Runner's band moved onto the campsite that Mountain Chief's had left; this happened just a short time before Joe Kipp led Baker to the site. Kipp knew that they had come upon the wrong band, but despite his telling Baker that, and despite the fact that "Chief Heavy Runner ran from his lodge toward the seizers [soldiers] on the bank...shouting to them and waving a paper writing...saying he was a good and peaceful man, [and] a friend of the whites[, he] had run but a few steps when he fell, his body pierced with bullets" (Shultz 301). Shultz records Colonel Baker as saying, before his four companies of the Second Calvary opened fire, "That makes no difference, one band or another of them; they are all Piegans and we attack them" (304). He then gave orders for Kipp to be shot if he interfered with the massacre. Shultz writes also, that neither Bear Head, son of the elder Bear Head who had been killed by Owl Child, nor the white soldiers ever got the revenge that they sought; "Owl Child had the terrible white-scabs disease [smallpox], and a few days later [after the massacre] he died" (303).

Welch uses some of these historical events exactly as they happened and presents others in such a way that they maintain the integrity of the history despite a slightly altered retelling. The character of Owl Child in *Fools Crow* does have a vicious nature and does kill Bear Head in a dispute over a scalp. Also, he does murder Malcolm Clark. However, Welch adds another act; Owl Child and his gang murder and rob a team of men transporting whiskey, which is what sparks the massacre of Heavy Runner's band. In Welch's novel, adhering to the Board of Indian Commissioners' version of the event, during the massacre the men and most boys are away hunting, and so it is largely women and children who are gunned down and burned to death. Heavy Runner does run towards the soldiers waving a piece of paper avowing his band as friends of the whites and, in return, is immediately shot to death. And, just as Shultz reports in his text, in *Fools Crow*, no one, white or Blackfoot, gets to confront Owl Child for his transgressions; he is one of Mountain Chief's people who contracts the white-scabs disease and dies.

Welch acknowledges that he used, along with stories from family and friends, James Willard Shultz's text, *Blackfeet and Buffalo: Memories of Life Among the Indians*, as part of the research necessary to write *Fools Crow*. That Welch used Shultz's piece

brings up an interesting parallel. Shultz was a white man who lived from 1859 to 1947. According to Keith C. Steele in the forward to *Blackfeet and Buffalo*, Schultz learned to speak the Blackfoot language at age eighteen, married a Pikuni, Fine Shield Woman (Mutsi-Awotan-Ahki), and was also given the name Apikuni by his friend Running Crane, “who had been Apikuni in his youth” (ix). Steele writes, “Apikuni’s reporting is unique for the reason that, though a white man, he was also truly an Indian” (vii). According to Steele because Shultz was part of a Blackfoot family and spoke and interacted with them constantly, Shultz “not only spoke Blackfoot, he *thought* it as well” (viii).

The interesting parallel here is that Longfellow’s source, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, was also a white man who had married an Indian woman, Jane Johnston, a Chippewa. However, whereas Shultz embraced and lived a Blackfoot life, Schoolcraft did what he could to separate himself and his wife from her Chippewa heritage. Ruoff writes, “Henry...wrote Jane in November 1830 that the family would follow Christ and urged his wife to cleave to him rather than her family” (82). He moved her and the children to New York City then traveled alone to England. Separated from her homeland and family, addicted to laudanum that had been prescribed as medication, and alone in New York, Jane Schoolcraft died in 1841 (Ruoff 83). Jane had helped Henry to write down Ojibwa stories, however, it can be surmised that those stories were being filtered through a person, Henry, who rejected rather than embraced the American Indian context essential to the telling of those stories. Therefore, the fiction that results from each source is distinctly different. Welch used a source, though written by a white man, that was steeped in Blackfoot cosmology. Paired with his own grounding as a Blackfoot and having listened to the stories of his Blackfoot relatives, he produced a text that was self-representative. Longfellow also produced a text that was self-representative. However, he did not recognize or did not acknowledge his poem as being the white, Euro-American, Christian tale that it was, but instead in his letters to Ferdinand Freiligrath claimed it as “uniquely Indian,” which it was not.

Finally, along with using historically accurate figures such as Owl Child, Mountain Chief, Heavy Runner, Joe Kipp, and others, Welch writes into existence his protagonist, White Man's Dog who later earns the name Fools Crow, his friend Fast Horse, and Fools Crow's wife and companion Red Paint. Unlike Longfellow's stock stereotypes of "noble savage"—Hiawatha, "wild savage"—Pau-Puk-Keewis, and "Indian princess"—Minnehaha, Welch's characters are psychologically complex human beings whose actions make sense in response to their environment. Through the construction of these characters placed in historically accurate situations and settings, Welch decolonizes by dispelling Longfellow-type stereotypical depictions.

White Man's Dog/Fools Crow is Welch's central character. In the time span of the novel, from the late 1860s to just after the Massacre at the Marias in January of 1870, he goes from being an awkward, unlucky young man named White Man's Dog to being a respected, rising leader of the Pikuni people and an apprentice to the many-faces man, Mik-api. Unlike Hiawatha who springs into manhood full of confidence and with superhuman strength, like the good romance hero that he is, Fools Crow has the human qualities of self-doubt, envy, and uncertainty, before he learns confidence and compassion for his people and settles into his own place within the community of Lone Eaters.

Longfellow writes:

Swift of foot was Hiawatha;  
He could shoot an arrow from him,  
And run forward with such fleetness,  
That the arrow fell behind him!  
Strong of arm was Hiawatha;  
He could shoot ten arrows upward,  
Shoot them with such strength and swiftness,  
That the tenth had left the bow-string  
Ere the first to earth had fallen! (47)

Granted, Longfellow thought he was writing about Manabozho, a larger than life figure in Ojibwa tales, but he presented Hiawatha and what he deemed as “authentic Indian stories” to the American public as an accurate portrayal of Indian peoples. This contributed to the stereotype of the “Indian” who, now that he had safely vanished, could be a fanciful, noble superhuman and as such could be used as an object in literature.

In contrast, Welch writes, “Not so lucky was White Man’s Dog. He had little to show for his eighteen winters.... His animals were puny, not a blackhorn runner among them. He owned a musket and no powder and his animal helper was weak” (3). In addition to being unlucky, Welch’s protagonist, White Man’s Dog, desires the spoils of battle and is infatuated with his father’s third wife, not a very auspicious start but one that allows for spiritual growth, psychological maturation, and change. Instead of superhuman strength bestowed on him through magic, like Hiawatha, White Man’s Dog earns self-respect and the respect of his people through his actions in the Crow raids, his apprenticeship under Mik-api, and his generous support of Yellow Kidney’s family even before he marries Yellow Kidney’s daughter, Red Paint. However, White Man’s Dog—now called Fools Crow because he killed the Crow Chief Bull Shield—maintains elements of uncertainty that allow him to remain believably human rather than a stereotypic object. For example, instead of assuming the position of Medicine Man without question, when Boss Ribs says to him “Mik-api tells me you are becoming wise in the ways of medicine,” Fools Crow responds, “I have helped Mik-api and he has taught me many things. There is so much to learn, sometimes I think my head is not capable of absorbing it all” (Welch 199). In addition, at the end of the novel, with the help of Feather Woman, Fools Crow has seen the hardships that the Blackfoot will experience. And, unlike Hiawatha, he is not able to have “happily-ever-after” certainty about the circumstances that are to come with the further encroachment of white settlers. Instead of blind confidence in the future, “He felt in his heart, in the rhythm of the drum, a peculiar kind of happiness—a happiness that sleeps with sadness” (390).

The development of Fools Crow’s friend, Fast Horse, is also in contrast to the colonized/colonizing stereotypic version of the “wild savage,” Pau-Puk-Keewis, by Longfellow. Pau-Puk-Keewis and Fast Horse are similar characters in that both are the

primary friend for each lead character in the respective texts. Also, in each story, both characters end up rejecting their connections to their people and specifically to each main character. This is where similarities end. Pau-Puk-Keewis appears to simply get bored with “Indian” life and this starts him on a downward spiral that includes gambling, random vandalism, and a mass killing of “Hiawatha’s mountain chickens” (Longfellow 167). In answer, Hiawatha hunts him down and kills him.

Fast Horse also strays from the ways of his people, but he does so in very different ways and with different and realistic motivations. Fast Horse is described early in the novel as “being chosen beyond his accomplishments” (Welch 7). When talking with White Man’s Dog, he says, “Soon I will be a very important man. Many women already find me attractive but their fathers know I am without wealth. I shall acquire this wealth from the fat Crows” (Welch 6-7). It is this over-confidence and bravado that leads to Fast Horse’s error in the Crow raid that in turn leads to Yellow Kidney being captured. Before the raid, Welch gives insight into Fast Horse’s character through the thoughts of Yellow Kidney. Musing on the preparation for the raid, Yellow Kidney thinks Fast Horse “was boastful and reckless and he wanted too much” (12). Foreshadowing events to come, Yellow Kidney thinks, “Such a man in a small party like this could bring disaster down on all of them,” but it is Yellow Kidney alone who experiences disaster (Welch 12). From this point on, it is the shame of what he has done, alerting the Crows of Yellow Kidney’s presence by taunting them in the middle of the horse raid, that drives Fast Horse further and further away from his people. He refuses to own up to his error and this creates in him a hatred of self and of his people. The fall from potential prominence to shamefulness haunts Fast Horse. He exiles himself, joins up with Owl Child’s gang, and emotionally isolates himself from all people, including his once friend, Fools Crow. Even when Boss Ribs, Fast Horse’s father, sends Fools Crow to find him and bring him back to the Lone Eaters band, Fast Horse refuses to reconnect saying “I don’t miss him [Boss Ribs]—or the Lone Eaters” (Welch 235). Fast Horse moves farther and farther from connections to his people, first to Owl Child’s “gang,” so described in the novel because, instead of being a working part of any band of the Blackfoot, the “gang” has itself separated itself from most bands and only loosely remains tied to



Mountain Chief. And, then, Fast Horse breaks away even from the gang, instead preferring to ride up north where, “he knew he would be welcome at the whiskey forts.... There were many men alone up there” (Welch 331).

Unlike Pau-Puk-Keewis, Fast Horse separates from but does not take out his anger on his own people. He finds an outlet for his brutality in killing the Napikwans, the white settlers. Fast Horse rationalizes his actions by consciously choosing to fight against those who are stealing the Blackfoot people’s land either by forced removal or by massacre. This is also an insight into Fast Horse’s character; rather than a stock “wild savage” stereotype, Welch writes Fast Horse as a thinking human being making hard choices and living with the consequences. Although he kills a red-headed settler, takes his scalp, and is angry because “he had wanted the Napikwan to die more, piece by piece,” Fast Horse also is conscious and perhaps worried when he and the others in Owl Child’s gang kill too close to Pikuni camps (Welch 217). He knows there is potential for retaliation and that it will not fall on the gang, they are too mobile; the reaction to what the gang has done will be felt by the bands encamped nearby.

In addition to showing some lingering concern for his people, he does finally take responsibility for his own failures. When he finds Yellow Kidney’s body, he sends it back to the people on a travois drawn by a horse. As Fast Horse watches the horse walk down a slope to the camp, Welch writes,

now he knew that it was he, and he alone, who created disaster that led to Yellow Kidney’s fall.... He felt an impulse to ride into camp, to the lodge of his father. But he knew he could not ask for forgiveness. He didn’t have it in him anymore. The suffering he and Owl Child and the others had caused had hardened him in a way that was irreversible. To ask forgiveness would be to ask for entry back into the lives of his people, and he was not one of them now. (330-1)

The complexity of Fast Horse defies the stereotypical “wild savage” depiction reinforced by Longfellow’s Pau-Puk-Keewis. Fast Horse is brutal, but he is because of his individual psychological make up and in reaction to the events happening around him.

Also, he is not wholly bad. Welch gives him the ability to have remorse, to feel responsibility, and to feel the pain of being alone.

Finally, Red Paint is another character-based example of Welch's decolonization of literature. Red Paint can be compared to Longfellow's "Indian princess," Minnehaha. As Minnehaha is Hiawatha's wife and companion, Red Paint is Fools Crow's. The union of Minnehaha and Hiawatha is very different than that of Red Paint and Fools Crow; they have very different interactions with one another, very different results of their unions, and the marriages are opposite in what they symbolize for the two texts on the whole.

Longfellow describes Minnehaha in the romantic style of his time: "light...as a feather" and "handsomest of all the women" (110-11). Red Paint also is described as an attractive woman, although in more realistic terms: "She was slender but the top of her loose buckskin dress had some shape. Her tight black braids just brushed the tips of her breasts" (64). When Hiawatha decides to marry Minnehaha, he receives consent from her father, the Dakotah arrow-maker, and then carries her through the forest to his lodge where they have a ceremony and feast replete with songs, dancing, storytelling, avowals of love from the bride and groom. The union between Fools Crow and Red Paint is much more low key; the families exchange gifts, Red Paint moves her things into Fools Crow's tipi and they have a feast. However, it is not these small details that are most important. What is key is the outcome for both couples.

Minnehaha is weakened by famine, succumbs to fever, and dies. And, as also previously noted, Hiawatha tells his people to listen to the "truth [the Christian missionaries] tell you" (217) and then floats off in his canoe "to the land of the Hereafter" (220). The couple is childless, and at the end of the text she is dead and he is gone. They are symbolically "vanishing" and leave the rest of their people to assimilation by the Christian missionaries. Thus, Longfellow's piece leaves the fate of Indian peoples in the hands and words of the white settlers. Longfellow seeks to replace/colonize Indian stories within his text by adding Christian missionaries and having his Indian hero, Hiawatha, value the words that they offer. Because he is writing a created "Indian"

world through his own white, Christian, New England filter, it makes sense to him that a “happily ever after” ending is through the introduction of white Christianity to the remaining “noble” savages.

However, in Welch’s novel *Red Paint* is an active partner for Fools Crow; they are together and, near the end, they have a child. This is significant especially when compared to Longfellow’s depiction of Hiawatha and Minnehaha. *Red Paint*, Fools Crow, and their child Butterfly are symbolic of a real, strong union that symbolizes the continuation of a Blackfoot worldview and way of living. Burlingame reaffirms Dexter Westrum’s observation that “the birth of Fools Crow and Red Paint’s son, Butterfly, is ‘an act of affirmation’ which perpetuates the tribe; the fact that it coincides with the Massacre on the Marias and the smallpox epidemic suggests that, despite the grave onslaughts against the Blackfeet, the Pikunis will continue to survive” (5). Using stories and believable characters who tell stories that they are a part of, Welch puts the survival of self and culture into the actions and words, through storytelling, of Blackfoot peoples.

In an interview published in the *South Dakota Review*, Welch says, “I hope my writing can keep reminding people that there is an Indian situation, problem, or however you want to put it—and that it’s still going on. They should be reminded of it by the writer, by the artist” (110). Lori Burlingame adds to this when she writes “It is a small wonder, then, that much contemporary Native writing attempts to come to terms with the history of Native-white relations in order to create a ‘useable past,’ find healing for the present, and offer hope for the future” (Burlingame 1-2). It is this “useable past” that is the important difference in these two pieces of literature. Where Longfellow creates an assimilationist past that suggests that problems will be solved with the coming of white “civilization” and Christianity, Welch offers a past steeped in self-responsibility, Blackfoot cosmology, and “hope for the future,” a Blackfoot future.

## Chapter Five

### My “White” Self in Two Worlds

The previous four chapters of this piece have been a comparison of the colonizing effects of white-authored literature about American Indians to the decolonizing effects of Indian-authored literature about American Indian peoples. The position(s) of non-Indian and Indian literary critics/scholars/academics has not been addressed. In the bigger literary picture, it is important to address not only who authors the texts, but also who authors the writings about those texts. Time for a declaration of self.

It is important to establish the position from which I discuss both Indian and non-Indian authored texts. Through family stories/history, on my father’s side there is evidence of English, German, and Norwegian ancestry and the possibility of a connection to an American Indian nation that lived in the early 1800s in what is now Washington County, Maryland. On my mother’s side, we are French and English, and have a possible connection through the Hill family to indigenous peoples who occupied what is now Nansemond County, Virginia, in all probability, the Nansemond Indian nation. Does this mean that I am an American Indian? No more so than it means that I am French or English or German or Norwegian. I am by all definitions white, middle-class, and raised in the suburbs. I have no personal knowledge of the boarding school experience. I have not lived on a reservation. I have never been discriminated against because I “look Indian.” When asked, “Are you Indian?”—as I often am because of how I look and what I choose to study—I classify myself as non-Indian. So then, what gives me the “right” to write anything at all on American Indian literature?

Is there room for a non-Indian academic in American Indian studies? Duane Champagne authored an essay entitled, “American Indian Studies is for Everyone,” and in it he writes,

In my view, there is room for both Indian and non-Indian scholars within American Indian studies, which includes relevant aspects of anthropology, art, religion, sociology, and other disciplines. To say that only Indians can study Indians goes too far toward excluding American

Indian culture and history from the rest of human history and culture....

One does not have to be a member of a culture to understand what culture means or to interpret a culture in a meaningful way. (181-182)

However, he goes on to write, "I say this in an ideal sense" (182). Champagne acknowledges that there are Indian scholars who criticize non-Indian scholars because they tend to interpret Indian life from a Western worldview and/or they focus on Indian peoples as victims rather than acknowledging five hundred plus years of cultural survival over colonial domination (182). In other words, Champagne knows that many Indian scholars do not believe that non-Indian scholars are living up to the "ideal"; they do not do the "rigorous study, fieldwork, and...[have the] sensitive orientation" that is required for both "Indian and non-Indian [academics to have a] greater understanding of Indian groups" (182).

This makes sense; in order to be a scholar of anything, one must do her homework. But with American Indian studies (as with others? I do not know, having only experienced an Indian/non-Indian situation), there is more to being a scholar than simply keeping up to date on context. Study of American Indian culture and literature must respect the beliefs and wishes of Indian communities and must benefit Indian communities in ways that the communities themselves deem valuable. This is not something that scholars can achieve simply by reading books. It is essential that writers and researchers talk to the people that they wish to study and/or write about. Ann Rinaldi provides a painful example of the results of *not* consulting Lakota peoples before choosing to write a historical fiction about them. After visiting Carlisle Indian Boarding School and seeing the headstones on the graves of children who died there, Rinaldi decided to write those names into her book. In the "About the Author" section at the end of *My Heart Is on the Ground*, Rinaldi is quoted as saying,

I found the Indian burial ground, with dozens of white headstones bearing the names of the Native American children from all tribes who had died while at the school. The names, with the tribes inscribed underneath, were so lyrical that they leapt out at me and took on instant personalities. Although many of these children attended Carlisle at dates

later than that of my story, I used some of their names for classmates of Nannie Little Rose.... I am sure that in whatever Happy Hunting Ground they now reside, they will forgive this artistic license, and even smile upon it. (195-196)

One can assume from the response to this by American Indian peoples, that Rinaldi never asked any Lakota relatives for permission to use their ancestor's name in her children's book. And, needless to say, I have yet to read a review from an Indian perspective in which the reviewers are "smiling" upon Rinaldi's abominable cultural theft.

I am aware that the simple acts of dissecting Indian-authored literature and attempting to critique white-authored literature about American Indians from an Indian-sympathetic point of view are loaded with the trappings of colonization. In doing these acts from my place of privilege within the dominant culture, I may be setting myself up as the very agent of colonization that I critique. I too am, from one perspective, using writing about American Indian history and literature to further my own career. So, what is it that separates me from someone like Ann Rinaldi? I hope that it is, in part, that I am trying to see and depict the potential damage to all of us that is a result of what she does. And, I am acknowledging and arguing for a more prominent place for literature that is accurate, although less comfortable, such as the autobiographical articles and short stories by Zitkala-Sa and the historically accurate work of James Welch. In addition, as Joel Monture wrote about "appropriation of culture" in regard to the Indian art world, I believe that it is simply not enough to shake my head and walk away from literary colonization.

However, there are two potential evils in being "outside" and trying to see and write from the "inside": I could be appropriating and colonizing, like Rinaldi, or I could be trying to "help the Indians" without ever asking if my help is wanted or needed, as Longfellow may have done. Both wrong turns happen because a writer/scholar assumes a position of superiority in which she either takes whatever she wants from Indian peoples or hands out whatever she deems needed to Indian peoples. Both are acts of

colonization, but both can be avoided by talking with, spending time with, and listening to Indian peoples, and then acting accordingly.

On this whole idea of being both inside and outside, I am the outside, non-Indian academic, knocking on the door, requesting to come in. In my situation, I have spent most all of my life on the outside and mere blinks of an eye on the “in.” Contrary to the New Critical literary theory once in vogue, context *is* necessary for a more full understanding of any piece of literature. However, more than simple knowledge of context is necessary in a white attempt at understanding American Indian literature; context is vital, necessary, required to even *begin* to have an *outsider’s* understanding. In *Power and Place*, a book co-authored by Vine Deloria, Jr., Daniel R. Wildcat writes, “With respect to culture, a person can have only the most superficial understanding of a people, especially their culture, if it is based primarily on the written word and only limited direct experience of their everyday lives” (18). This is the place from which I write. I am at the beginning and I know it. Fortunately for me as a human being first and as an academic second, there are those folks who are presenting me (present-ing, as in giving me a great gift) with the opportunity to have more than “limited direct experience.”

I have a deep interest for this, in Bruchac’s words, “literature which stands on its own” even though, some people would argue, I can never really understand it. So, I struggle with this. Does this mean that I abandon my interest? If I cannot get “there” from “here,” maybe I should simply choose another destination? I have come to the conclusion that that is not the solution for me, or any scholar “outside” of a culture or literature that she or he would like to study. Bruchac continues,

perhaps we might see it in terms of the image given us by the Iroquois in the famous two-row wampum belt which spelled out, more than two centuries ago, the relationship the Iroquois saw between themselves and the whites. The two rows on the belt represent two canoes going down the river. One is the white canoe, the other the Indian. They go in the same direction and may even be traveling at the same speed. However, they are

separate boats and it is very hard to travel far or stay in balance when you have one foot in each boat. (“Contemporary” 322)

Indian academics choose the balancing act of standing with one foot in indigenous culture and one foot in predominantly white academia. Non-Indian academics studying Indian literature choose the balancing act of standing with one foot in predominantly white academia and one foot in indigenous culture. I cannot speak for Indian academics, but for myself, even if it is difficult for me to stand, what is the alternative? The recourse would be to stay, comfortably and ignorantly, in my own boat, ignoring the boat sharing the same river and perhaps ignoring the class five rapids we’re both about to hit. However uncomfortable standing may be, it is not my choice to comfortably sit.



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**English 4974 – Independent Study**, American Indian Literature with Professor Harry Dyer (Western Cherokee), seminar papers:

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