

TRACKING WHITENESS: PORTRAYALS OF WHITES  
IN AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

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Although whites have pervaded the lives and literatures of American Indians since contact, their own portrayals of whites have remained, for the most part, unexplored. I examine selected works of nineteenth and twentieth-century American Indian writers to discern ways that whites are portrayed collectively and individually. The most salient categories of whites emerge early on as government officials, educators, and missionaries, those most directly engaged in the “civilizing mission.” Similar categories of white characters, with the addition of white doctors, are found throughout twentieth-century American Indian fiction. Also in these works, numerous individual whites are portrayed as multidimensional, dynamic characters whose actions range from greedy, self-serving, and contemptuous to benevolent, respectful, and compassionate. Viewing these portrayals through the lenses of postcolonialist theory and white studies reveals

that American Indian writers have probed beneath the white skin to see into the hearts of these people who have invaded their lands and lives.

Beginning with collective portrayals of whites in nineteenth-century nonfiction works of William Apess, George Copway, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Charles Eastman, and Zitkala-Ša, this study then examines collective portrayals of whites in three twentieth-century novels of Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Linda Hogan. Individual portrayals of whites follow, as found not only in works of Silko, Erdrich, and Hogan, but also in those of D'Arcy McNickle, John Joseph Mathews, N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Michael Dorris, Sherman Alexie, Greg Sarris, and David Treuer. Overall, portrayals of white characters range from evil to good, from one-dimensional and stereotypical to richly complex and enigmatic. Exposing whiteness in such an array serves to displace it from its center of superiority, privilege, and power.

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## PREFACE

In his preeminent text of postcolonialist theory, *The Location of Culture* (1992), Homi Bhabha affirms his hope for humanity on the cusp of a new century. Although already marked by strife, racism, oppression, and other legacies of colonialism, the twenty-first century becomes Bhabha's "beyond," a site of possibility and promise:

The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. . . . Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. (Bhabha 1)

Today, "[b]eginnings and endings," as set forth in inscribed histories of peoples, no longer hold true when viewed by other than the dominant cultures; borders drawn to separate different groups of people no longer suffice in this "moment of transit." Rather, a border or boundary becomes "not that at which something stops but. . . that from which *something begins its presencing*" (Heidegger, qtd. in Bhabha 1). Viewed in this way, borders, no longer limiting features, open up spaces for "the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (2). Such spaces in-between become springboards for the "beyond," where "complex figures of difference and identity" are enacted.

In the United States today, where minority groups still clamor for equality and justice, a need for negotiation endures. Following his claim that it is in "the emergence of the interstices. . . that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural



value are negotiated” (2), Bhabha poses questions applicable to our society rife with cultural difference:

How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (2)

Although numerous communities express “competing claims” and could certainly benefit from negotiation and “strategies of representation or empowerment,” my focus is on American Indians. I will explore their own particular “strategies of representation” of whites, as these groups have interacted throughout American history.

Of course, American Indians are not a homogeneous community but are composed of a multitude of tribes with distinctive histories and cultural differences; however, they share in the scars of colonialism and are often viewed from a postcolonialist lens. Problems arise from such a perspective, though, because effects of colonialism in the United States are different from those explored by postcolonialist theorists, who have “drawn almost exclusively from the experiences of populations in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean” (Allen 4). Because of the ongoing colonialism that exists in the United States regarding the indigenous population, different issues arise and conflicts continue. The postcolonialist anathema, “essentialism,” becomes fitting for American Indians whose “discourses often emphasize land and treaty rights” (30). On the other hand, the thrust toward multiculturalism, with its categorizing of American Indians with other minorities, is felt to be “inadequate and misguided” (110). For these reasons, although

postcolonialist theory is often applied to American Indian literature, it does not always play out similarly to that of other settler colonies' literatures. However, I have chosen to apply aspects of this theory to the literature of American Indians, mainly because so many of what Ania Loomba terms "legacies of colonialism" are revealed. Also, embedded in their oral and written literatures, at least since the time of contact, are encounters with whites, whose pervading, invading presence overturned and overpowered the Natives' traditional ways of living. Also evident in their literatures are "strategies of representation or empowerment" by these culturally different colonized peoples, and a study of the formulation of such strategies forms the basis of this dissertation, which focuses on portrayals of whiteness.

According to Bhabha, "The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition" (3). For the American Indians, such a "fixed tablet of tradition" would be mainstream history, in which their true tales are rarely told; instead, accounts of white history are embellished with courageous acts, justified by the urge to civilize (or destroy) the indigenous savages. However, Bhabha suggests that such simplistic histories are unacceptable and must also be told by the "other" side: "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (2). Indeed, he calls for a transformation of history, which, neither simple nor fixed, must be articulated also by the minority: "The 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege. . . is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority.'" (2) Thus, American Indians, certainly in the minority and on "the

periphery of authorized power and privilege,” deserve the right to reinscribe history from their own perspectives. In Chapters 1 and 2, I will explore examples of Natives’ rewriting of history from their perspectives through nonfiction and fiction. In all of these works, whites are portrayed collectively as they have acted “through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness,” and their harsh treatment of Indians is exposed. Since the two become inextricably bound when applied to the history of America, both white studies and postcolonialist theory will form the framework for my exploration of portrayals of whiteness in American Indian literature. In *White*, Richard Dyer provides applicable theoretical principles even though his “contexts for looking at whiteness” (4) are found solely in “white” texts, and mine are not. However, we share a similar goal: “to see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule” (4). In addition, I agree with Dyer that “[i]n a work of this kind, there must always be an interaction between generalizations and specific instances, between the theoretical and empirical. Theory needs checking against the particularity” (xiv-xv). Therefore, in the overall structure of my own work, I will move from the general (collective portrayals of whites in chapters 1 and 2) to the particular (individual portrayals of whites in chapter 3 and 4) in “checking” the theory. I will also refer to Ruth Frankenberg’s explanations of how whiteness has been constructed and performed from the beginnings of colonialism through today. Ania Loomba’s *Colonialism-Postcolonialism* will be used to explore imperialism, colonialism, and its “legacies,” which include capitalism, materialism, and greed of the white colonizers. Finally, I will show how American Indian writers move “beyond” Bhabha’s definition of stereotype to discern differences in whites and to portray them with a fairness that is perhaps undeserved. Throughout the literature examined, I

will argue that fascinating insights into whiteness are revealed, resulting in “complex figures of difference and identity” (Bhabha 1).

To provide a context for my own work, a glimpse into scholarship drawing upon postcolonialist theory and race studies is in order here. Although it has been over 100 years since W. E. B. DuBois’s claim that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (xli), this statement resonates as strongly now as it did then. Today, however, the people of the United States encounter numerous “color lines” as opposed to the black/white binary explored by Du Bois. Some of these racial distinctions are in the process of blurring with “whiteness” (still the most blinding color), while others have retained marked differences. The American literary canon and its accompanying scholarship, once dominated almost exclusively by white males, now includes racially “different” (as well as differently gendered) works, thanks to monumental changes initiated in the 1960s. With the Civil Rights Movement’s momentum during that decade, along with America’s bitterly protested incursion into the Vietnam War, this turbulent time gave rise to the recognition of non-white voices in the social, political, literary, and scholarly realms. Although African-American voices were the strongest, resulting in ground-breaking changes to college curricula and the literary canon, American Indian voices were heeded when N. Scott Momaday’s 1968 novel *House Made of Dawn* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969. The next three decades of American literature would be forever changed with color lines clearly displayed.

With the emergence of diverse perspectives articulated in late twentieth-century American literature, scholars delved into the reasons for and results of the past suppression of non-white literary works. The field of critical theory flourished, stimulating studies of

colonialism, postcolonialism, and race, among others. In addition to creating new approaches to viewing minority literature, scholars began to view white, canonical American literature in innovative ways. In response to Toni Morrison's call to discern the "dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (5) that has always existed in American literature came numerous scholarly endeavors to unearth and dissect portrayals of black characters in white literature. In response to attention focused on literary portrayals of the "Other," came a counter-study of whiteness, with initial forays into representations of whites and whiteness in American culture and literature. Such representations have, for the most part, focused on (white) American literature and African American literature, corresponding to the salience of black/white relations in race theory and social experience. Although studies have abounded concerning American Indian, Chicano, and Asian writers' contributions to American literature, scholarly attempts to view whiteness and white characters in these works are rare. One reason for this neglect of scholarship is noted by Valerie Babb, in her 1998 work *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*. Here, Babb not only traces the crafting of whiteness from the settling of the colonies through the twentieth-century, providing a scathing exposure of the pervasiveness of white superiority throughout American culture. She speculates that the reason for "scholarly silence" in this area is that it perpetuates the notion of "whiteness being presumed the norm" (15).

Although whiteness has not been scrutinized in American Indian literature, literary critics, both Indian and non-Indian, have explored numerous aspects of this rich area of study. Scholarship focuses on multi-voiced narratives, ties to place and community, identity, adaptation, survival, and continuance, but most often with a concentration on Indian characters

and their struggles and triumphs in the face of such adversity. However, in his 1988 “Postscript” to his 1967 *Savagism and Civilization*, Roy H. Pearce envisions “a study of the Indian image of the white as it has become a means of his developing an image of himself, a study of the idea of Civilization as it at once has been introjected into the Indian psyche and helped to shape it” (255). My work in this area provides an attempt to answer part of Pearce’s call; I will closely examine “the Indian image of the white” as portrayed in American Indian literature. My goal, however, is not to discern how whiteness has shaped the Indian, but how whiteness has been exposed and illuminated by the Indian.

The scope of this project spans American Indian writing beginning with an examination of five nineteenth-century nonfiction writers: William Apess (Pequot), George Copway (Ojibwe), Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (Paiute), Charles Eastman (Sioux), and Zitkala-Ša, all discussed in chapter one. These writers boldly question the effectiveness and value of whites’ civilizing missions, from Christianity through the Indian boarding school system. The next chapters will cover most major twentieth-century American Indian fiction writers. Chapter Two provides an analysis of collective portrayals of white characters in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*, and Linda Hogan’s *Mean Spirit*. In these novels, whites are portrayed as power-wielding and materialistic, intent on appropriating not only land but valuable natural resources in their enterprising spirit. In Chapter Three, close reading as well as theoretical applications of numerous fictional works will provide a broad array of individual white characters. Selected works of D’Arcy McNickle, John Joseph Mathews, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Michael Dorris, Linda Hogan, Sherman Alexie, Greg Sarris, and David Treuer reveal portrayals of white characters from one-

dimensional to richly complex. The final chapter reveals a panorama of priests and nuns, in works by James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, D'Arcy McNickle, David Treuer, Michael Dorris, and Louise Erdrich, organized from least to most salient of these "saints." These writers have created some of the most fascinating and important white characters in American Indian literature.

Through this examination of ways that whites have been portrayed by American Indians, I seek to show that postcolonialist theory, especially as related to the legacies of colonialism, and white studies certainly apply yet are not close-ended. Through their rich portrayals of whites, these writers have moved "beyond" and produced "complex figures of difference and identity" (Bhabha 1). However, "difference" here is not that of the "Other," but rather that of the dominant, (post)colonialist culture. Furthermore, the "'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege" (2) has been exercised with illuminating insights by these American Indian writers.

## CHAPTER 1

### PALEFACE IN THE LOOKING-GLASS: COLLECTIVE PORTRAYALS OF WHITES IN NONFICTION

In his “Foreword” to Roy H. Pearce’s 1966 reissue of *Savagism and Civilization*, scholar Arnold Krupat summarizes “variants of American thought about the Indian” (xi). The first, as specified by Pearce, was “that Indians were considered the same as all other men, capable, that is, of seduction by Satan. . . but also of salvation. The Puritan aim, then, was to transform the Indian, to improve him as land might be improved, lifting him from the wild state of nature to civilization and to God” (xi-xii). From this statement came an important goal of the colonizers of this “New World,” that of improving the original inhabitants, or “savages.” Under the guise of “civilization,” yet often by violence, white, western European values, such as language, Christianity, education, and government, were forced upon the Natives of America. All of the nineteenth-century writers discussed in this chapter reveal varying results of such assimilation, achieved through their adaptation to the civilizing mission of the colonizing whites.

In his exploration of the racial imagery of whiteness, Richard Dyer, in *White*, traces its roots to the concept of embodiment, which is constituted of three elements: “Christianity, ‘race’ and enterprise/imperialism” (14). The idea of “body” is key since Christ’s body is considered the incarnation of God’s spirit. In addition, embodiment refers to bodies, upon which race, generally “seen” in physical characteristics, is inscribed. It is only in white bodies, however, that Dyer’s notion of embodiment occurs: “Black people can be reduced (in white culture) to their bodies and thus to race, but white people are something else that is realized in and yet is not



reducible to the corporeal, or racial” (14-15). This “something else” involves Dyer’s concept of “spirit” (not to be confused with “soul”). It is this spirit, which Dyer points to as the distinguishing characteristic of whiteness. According to western European Christians, some people were endowed with this “spirit,” and some were not. Evidences of this spirit were in the whites’ qualities of aspiration, intellectual awareness, aesthetics—in short, all that made one “civilized.” Another quality of this spirit was that of enterprise, which was manifested in a penchant for exploration, discovery, and invention.

The enterprising explorers, who were mostly white, western European Christians, paved the way for imperialism. Dyer, of British nationality, seems to use the terms “imperialism” and “colonialism” interchangeably, which, Ania Loomba notes in *Colonialism-Postcolonialism*, often occurs. Loomba distinguishes colonialism, “the take over of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation” (6), from imperialism, “a political system in which an imperial centre governs colonized countries. . . . [and] is primarily an economic system of penetration and control of markets” (6). Loomba also notes that both of these enactments of power are played out somewhat differently depending on historical and spatial contexts. In the context of North America, it was such white Christians from Europe who acted out their enterprising spirit and became not only the major colonizers throughout the world but also the major exploiters of the indigenous inhabitants. Thus, Christianity became associated with whiteness, and this idea of “spirit” became a rationalization for various “brands” of colonialism or imperialism. The Eurocentric notion that the “Others” encountered in explorations must be savage and uncivilized prevailed, and methods of inculcating “white” culture and values were enforced.

It is these aspects of whiteness, as delineated by Dyer's idea of embodiment and expanded upon by Loomba's definitions of colonialism and imperialism, that I will apply to collective portrayals of whites in selected nonfiction works of five nineteenth-century American Indian writers: William Apess (Pequot), George Copway (Ojibwe), Sarah Winnemucca [Hopkins] (Paiute), Charles Eastman (Sioux), and Zitkala-Ša [Gertrude Bonnin] (Sioux). All of these writers have first-hand experience with Christianity, whether practiced by themselves or witnessed in others; thus, Dyer's "white" aspects of Christianity and resulting actions of Christians become apparent. However, these writers courageously question the whites' practices of Christianity, which generally do not match the principles preached. In addition to Christianity, other colonialist values are revealed and questioned by these writers, especially Loomba's points concerning the "take over of territory" and "the interference with political and cultural structures." Finally, since the last two writers discussed wrote during the Indian boarding school era, I will apply Amelia Katanski's theory of situational identities and agency as they adapt to white culture. As the dominating whites press ever westward, making and breaking treaties along the way and enforcing assimilation, all five of these writers reveal their attempts to combat "European dominance with the word rather than the arrow" (Ruoff, "Reversing" 212).

For all of these early writers, the fact that they used "the word" and published life writings in English attests to their own mastery of the language and conventions of their colonizers. As noted scholar Arnold Krupat states in his 1994 anthology of *Native American Autobiography*, "Tribal people were oral people who represented personal experience performatively and dramatically to an audience. Personal exploits might be presented pictographically (i.e., in tipi decorations or other types of drawing), but never in alphabetic

writing” (3). These “tribal people,” however, to reach an audience much wider than that of their tribe, had to transform oral traditions handed down through their own languages into written English words. Moreover, these writers, in choosing to write about their own, individual lives and concerns, necessitated another re-orientation in worldview, from one based on community to one focused on the individual. Whether an autobiographical or historical work was authored by an Indian or was a collaborative work, the act of communicating such information “may be seen as the textual equivalent of the ‘frontier,’ as the discursive ground on which two extremely different cultures met and interacted” (4). It is onto this “discursive ground” that these early American Indian writers ventured in order to articulate their own particular ways of coping with and adapting to the momentous changes wrought by whites. At the same time, these writers strived to maintain their own sense of pride in their traditional cultures. Also, for true interaction, their writing needed to appeal to white audiences, thus conforming to the dominant culture’s expectations. Thus, this “discursive ground” was fraught with tensions and complexities.

The first writer to be examined, William Apess, reveals some of the causes and consequences of such tensions as he articulates his own experiences with whites and with Christianity, which become entangled, both theoretically and practically. David Murray, in *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing & Representation in North American Indian Texts*, notes the ambivalence of Apess’s position: “It is the complex relation between on the one side the Christian civilized Indian, affirmer of white values, and on the other the Indian proud of his heritage and bitterly critical of white actions which is most interesting in his work” (57). Indeed, it is this disconnect between white values and white actions that Apess bitterly criticizes,

especially in “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man.” In addition, Apess explores whiteness as embodiment as well as symbol, issues that prefigure Dyer’s tenets of race studies in the late twentieth century. Underpinning Apess’s portrayals of whites is his “play” with interiority versus exteriority, a pattern noted by Scott Michaelsen in *The Limits of Multiculturalism* (64). Truly a pioneer in his boldness to speak out, Apess “paved the way for what Native authors can do today” (Womack 3). Furthermore, although the advent of white studies as an area of critical theory did not occur until the 1990s, Apess’s writings of the early nineteenth century reveal similar struggles with the complexities of the concept of race. It is almost as though Apess provides practical applications of Richard Dyer’s theoretical explorations of whiteness. Both grapple with the conflation of Christianity and whiteness; Dyer traces the roots of this conundrum, and Apess reveals the results.

In *White*, Dyer notes the enigmatic blend of whiteness and Christianity, with his “notion of the white body, of embodiment, of whiteness involving something that is in but not of the body” (14). This embodiment incorporates Christianity, race, and the spirit of enterprise, resulting in imperialism and its variations, along with the exercise of power and privilege. In addition, Dyer distinguishes “three senses of white as colour, three ways in which it is felt and understood” (45), which are hue, skin, and symbol. The sense of white as hue carries with it conflicting definitions of white as both the absence of color and white as all colors. This ambiguity causes indeterminacy and “slippage” of whiteness: “The slippage between white as a colour and white as colourlessness forms part of a system of thought and affect whereby white people are both particular and nothing in particular, are both something and non-existent” (47). Another type of slippage occurs with white as skin color or pigmentation, which is not at all truly

white. In fact, nationalities of peoples with “off-white” skin have been excluded and later included with those of “pure” white skin throughout the history of the United States, mostly depending on economic, labor, and political needs of the time. Finally, the sense of white as a symbol of good with its opposite, black, as a symbol of bad, also results in a slippage, so that “questions of color elide with questions of morality” (622). Then, the sense of whiteness as moral purity and goodness become enmeshed in Christianity, further complicating the notion, according to Dyer. Apess, writing a century and a half before Dyer, strategically uses these same complexities of whiteness as he portrays whites, resulting in censure.

Racial specifications seem to be important to Apess, who opens his autobiography by stating, “My [paternal] grandfather was a white man and married a female attached to the royal family of Philip, king of the Pequot tribe of Indians” (4). Apess is then careful to note that his father, a mixed-blood, “joined the Pequot tribe, to which he was maternally connected. . . . and in a short afterward married a female of the tribe, in whose veins a single drop of the white man’s blood never flowed” (4). Although these claims are debated by Barry O’Connell in the introduction to his 1992 edition of *On Common Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, a Pequot* (xxvii n.17), Apess feels such clear racial distinctions are necessary. When Apess was three, his parents separated from each other and sent him and his siblings to live with grandparents, who were “wedded to that beastly vice intemperance” (Apess 5), beat their grandchildren often, and frequently neglected to feed them. Apess is careful to note that these were his grandparents on his mother’s (full-blooded Pequot) side, and that the parents of his (mixed-blood) father “were Christians, [who] lived and died happy in the love of God” (6). However, Apess does not blame his maternal grandparents for their “cruel and unnatural

conduct” (7). Rather he attributes “it in a great measure to the whites, inasmuch as they introduced among my countrymen that bane of comfort and happiness, ardent spirits—seduced them into a love of it and, when under its unhappy influence, wronged them out of their lawful possessions—that land where reposed the ashes of their sires” (7). Thus, Apess portrays whites as manipulative, greedy, immoral people “for dispossessing natives of their lands and then corrupting them” (O’Connell 1) with alcohol. Yet it is from this race of people that come Apess’s rescuers, a benevolent white family who takes him in, provides, and cares for him throughout his childhood. Thus, the ambiguities of race enter his narrative from the beginning.

As he adapts to the white ways of his foster family, Apess goes to school, where he learns to read and write in English, and to church, where he is introduced to Christianity. The influence of white ways, coupled with memories of abuse from his grandparents, makes Apess fear his “brethren of the forest,” as revealed in the following account. While seeking berries in the woods, Apess “fell in with a company of white females . . . [whose] complexion was, to say the least, as *dark* as that of the natives” (Apess 10). Terrified, Apess runs home, telling his guardian that he “had met a body of natives in the woods” (11). In his writing, he reveals that he was terrified of his brethren, or natives, because of the cruelty he had heard they committed upon whites. Ironically, although he notes that the females encountered were white, he calls them natives because of the darkness of their skin. This association with natives fills “his mind with terror” (10) because he has been told “many stories . . . of their cruelty toward the whites” (11). Here, Apess conflates all three of Dyer’s senses of white: hue (the immediately recognized “color” of the females), skin (dark), and symbol (cruelty of the dark natives). Following this account, Apess, as now-grown narrator, comments on his error:

But the whites did not tell me that they were in a great majority of instances the aggressors—that they had imbrued their hands in the lifeblood of my brethren, driven them from their once peaceful and happy homes—that they introduced among them the fatal and exterminating diseases of civilized life. If the whites had told me how cruel they had been to the “poor Indian,” I should have apprehended as much harm from them. (11)

Thus, upon reflection, Apess’s portrayals of natives and whites become reversed as he reveals what the whites, his adoptive brethren, did not tell him. He has to learn himself of their true nature and actions, which are opposite of their own stories. Interestingly, it now appears that his first fear, that of the (dark) whites, was the more logical one, providing what Murray notes as an interesting twist to this tale: “[A]n Indian being in danger from whites when he ventures into the forest is both a historical truth and an ironic reversal of white fears” (59). Certainly, Apess reveals his own type of “play” with literal and figurative concepts of skin color, in addition to his own “colorful” childhood.

Apess’s white upbringing includes his conversion to Christianity, and as he matures, his discerns distinctions between his own practices of Christianity and those of whites professing to be Christians. He denounces them for their hypocrisy and degradation of the Indians, which he claims is certainly not according to the will of God, “who will show no favor to outward appearances but will judge righteousness” (155). Such superior attitudes of whites turn Apess against Christianity until he finds Methodism, a denomination that considered Indians to be as worthy of God’s love as whites. With these God-loving people, Apess finally becomes “convinced that Christ died for all mankind—that age, sect, color, country, or situation made no

difference” and that he, too, “was included in the plan of redemption with all my brethren” (19). Although Apess states that his “love now embraced the whole human family” (21), he does not perceive this love acted out by whites professing to be Christians. In fact, he is “bold to aver that the minds of the natives were turned against the Gospel and soured toward the whites because some of the missionaries have joined the unholy brethren in speculations to the advantage of themselves” (33). From this example, concluded from Apess’s experience with whites and Christians, we can see how whiteness and Christianity collide.

Whiteness, with its accompanying attitudes of superiority, privilege, and power, becomes an embodiment not merely of Dyer’s spirit of enterprise, but of extreme pride. Christianity, on the other hand, the belief the incarnation of Christ, is based on humility. The difficulty of reconciliation of the two is apparent; it seems that one must trump the other, and history is rife with examples of each. Apess, however, strikes at the heart of this problem in his scathing critique, “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man.” The interplay of Christianity and whiteness, of interiority and exteriority, is reflected in Apess’s looking-glass metaphor.

In this culminating critique, Apess cites Scripture, with book, chapter, and verse, to demonstrate to white Christians that they are not at all acting as Christ taught. Moreover, he performs another ironic twist on skin color when he condemns white Christians for their superior, hypocritical racist attitudes: “But reader, I acknowledge that this is a confused world, and I am not seeking for office, but merely placing before you the *black* inconsistency that you place before me—which is ten times *blacker* than any skin that you will find in the universe” (157, emphasis added). Thus, using what Dyer terms the symbolic sense (albeit it an unfortunate one) of “black,” Apess applies it to the white hypocrites’ actions, or inconsistencies,



creating “an extended play on the idea of skin colour” (Murray 61). Apess has “seen” whiteness for what it is, for how it is embodied in Christians, and in doing so, has “marked” it by calling it black. Dyer’s sense of white as symbol applies aptly here, and “questions of color elide with questions of morality” (62). The interesting twist here, is that white-skinned Christians’ acts are marked as black symbolically. Thus, what is reflected in the looking-glass (and portrayed by Apess) is not “white” skin but “black” actions.

To continue his polemic on white Christians, Apess asks penetrating questions to incite his readers to look at themselves in relation to those with different-colored skin:

Did you even hear or read of Christ teaching his disciples that they ought to despise one because his skin was different from theirs? Jesus Christ being a Jew, and those of his Apostles certainly were not whites—and did not he who completed the plan of salvation complete it for the whites as well as for the Jews, and others? And were not the whites the most degraded people on the earth at that time? (158)

Here, Apess plays with Dyer’s sense of white according to skin color while referring to Christianity’s historical roots. To be sure, Dyer notes Christ’s Jewish origin (and, thus, skin color) and then maps out the “distinctly white ways” that Christianity has been viewed: “the gentilising and whitening of the image of Christ and the Virgin in painting; the ready appeal to the God of Christianity in the prosecution of doctrines of racial superiority and imperialism” (17). A salient point that Dyer misses is one that Apess picks up on. At the time of Christ, all “others” or non-Jews, were Gentiles, “and were not the whites [Gentiles] the most degraded

people on earth at that time?” (Apess 158). Once again, Apess reverses whiteness as he reflects it in his looking-glass.

Furthermore, Apess argues, the injustices committed on the Indians by white Christians have not exemplified one of the most important principles of Christianity, that of loving one’s neighbor as oneself. It is Apess’s hope that his writing will prompt white readers who call themselves Christians to hold up a looking-glass and truly examine themselves. In so doing, they may discover that their own principles are merely “skin-deep” (160) and change their ways. In adopting the colonizers’ religion, Apess has proven to be more “Christian” than those who preach love and light but are dark within.

Other glimpses into “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man” are given by David Murray and Scott Michaelsen. Murray notes the ambiguity of the title itself, “which allows us to visualize either an Indian looking at himself for the benefit of whites, or an Indian holding up a mirror so that the white man can see himself” (61). Although my previously noted points would serve to reinforce the second possibility, the first one provokes an equally intriguing notion. Murray goes on to explain “that as an educated Indian Apes [sic] could be said to have been created in the whites’ own image” (61). Yet, rather than whites’ viewing an Indian who conforms to their idea of civilization, they see “the degenerate and demoralised Indians who are equally a creation of white civilization” (61). To add another layer to this metaphor, Michaelsen suggests that “an ‘Indian’s looking-glass; may be, in fact, ‘an Indian’: the Indian *as* looking glass for the white man. The ‘looking-glass’ is Apess’s text—a ‘red’ piece of writing” (63). These last two possibilities reinforce a notion undergirding race theory, that whites see “others” only as they relate to themselves. Dyer, referring to points made by Toni Morrison in *Playing in*

*the Dark* and Edward Said in *Orientalism*, articulates this phenomenon: “[W]hite discourse implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject, . . . permitting neither the recognition of similarities nor the acceptance of differences except as a means for knowing the white self” (Dyer 13). Apess’s looking-glass, then, becomes an ingenious device for reflecting and subverting whiteness.

Michaelsen expounds upon Apess’s “Indian’s Looking Glass,” describing the work as an ironic play with interiority/exteriority and skin colors white/black/red. Considering the possibility that Apess’s text is the looking-glass, Michaelsen notes, “If this is so, the white man gazes at the text of color and sees himself. . . . [then] reads the text only to understand *himself* as colored in some fashion or other, and this is precisely Apess’s point” (63). Michaelsen then cites examples from Apess that open up possibilities for whites to become “colored.” In addition to the quote above referring to whites’ “black inconsistency,” their hypocrisy, Michaelsen notes Apess’s suggestion that all people be “put together, and each skin [have] its national crimes written upon it” (Apess 157). In that case, the whites would surely be the darkest: “Whites, if their acts were made visible—if the results of their ‘principles’ were shown on their skins—would be bodies covered with ink, tattooed to a ‘blackness’ far darker than the skin color of any Indian. . . [and] morally colored” (Michaelsen 64). Thus, Apess has attempted to “mark” whiteness, to make it visible, on the exterior, the skin. Furthermore, Apess notes that “there reigns *in the breast* of many who are leaders a most unrighteous, unbecoming, and impure black principle, and as corrupt and unholy as it can be” (156; emphasis added). “Marking” darkness not only on the exterior of whites, Apess extends it to the interior, making them “black” through and through. Finally, Michaelsen affirms “that the determination of who is *really* colored in this

world is a product of representational practices, and not something natural” (64), or resulting from skin pigmentation.

Positioned among the earliest of American Indian writers, Apess displays complex, provocative perceptions of the interrelationships of race and Christianity. He truly looks beneath outward appearances and sees the heart, evidenced by one’s actions, revealing Christ’s teaching that “[a] good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit. . . . So then, you will know them by their fruits” (*New American Standard Bible* Mt. 7: 17, 19). As a result of his own conversion to Christianity and his insight into Christ’s teachings, Apess has pinpointed one of the major problems of “Christianizing” the Indians. Many white Christians have not at all acted out their beliefs and teachings, thus becoming stumbling blocks to those they try to convert. Yet, even as a recipient of prejudice and injustice of white Christians, Apess is able to acknowledge the existence of many whites sympathetic to the Indians’ cause. He sees them as “noble spirits” (160), who truly honor their Maker and will be rewarded: “[T]he Lord will reward you, and pray you stop not till this tree of distinction shall be leveled to the earth, and the mantle of prejudice torn from every American heart—then shall peace pervade the Union” (160-61). Thus, even in his piercing portrayals of white Christians and their collective role in the history of Indian/white relations, Apess’s final call, one of hope and not of despair, resounds today.

A similar call is echoed in the work of another Indian who, like Apess, converted to Christianity and published his own writings in English. George Copway [Kah-Ge-Ga-Gah-Bowh] (Ojibway), in his 1860 *Indian Life and Indian History*, prefaces this work with his two main goals:

As the first volume of Indian history written by an Indian, with a hope that it may in some degree benefit his nation, and be the means of awakening an interest for the red men of America, in those whose homes are where they once lived and loved, this work is sent forth tremblingly, yet with hope, by its author, Kah-Ge-Ga-Ga-Bowh. (x-xi)

Thus, Copway affirms his hopes that this writing will help his own people (or “nation”) and will also prompt an interest for his people in the minds of whites (“those whose homes are where they [Indians] once lived and loved”). From the beginning, we see Copway’s portrayal of whites as those who have taken away his own people’s land and who must not yet have any interest in “the red men of America.” Throughout the rest of his work, this double-pronged purpose is elucidated; details of Ojibwe life and history are interspersed with Copway’s views, both negative and positive, about whites.

In addition to providing his purpose, Copway is careful to address his audience and establish *ethos*, all important in a rhetorical text. Categorizing his white audience as “the public,” “the Christian and Philanthropist,” “the man of letters,” and “Friends and Christians” (v-xi), Copway appeals to all who might help him in his endeavor. Furthermore, Copway establishes *ethos* by stating that although he feels incompetent, his “pen is guided by an intimate knowledge of the subject it traces out” (vi). In addition, he notes that his experience includes “twenty months . . . in a school in Illinois. . . . [and] residence of six years among the pale-faces” (vi). It is during these six years that Copway has “acquired a knowledge of men and things” (vii), and it is this knowledge that he wishes to impart to another sector of his audience. Humbly admitting that he has “much, very much more” to learn, Copway adds, “and it is my desire that

my brethren in the far west may share with me my crust of information” (viii). Of course, these “brethren” must be literate in English and have access to Copway’s *Indian Life and Indian History*; otherwise, this purpose will not be achieved. Thus, Copway’s principal audience is white, and he continues his rhetorical strategies in seeking common ground with them.

In continuing his preface, Copway notes, “I . . . am impelled forward by the thought that the nation whose history I here feebly sketch seems passing away” (viii). His implicit agreement with the nineteenth century notion that Indians were “a vanishing race” serves as common ground for Copway and his audience, as does his affirmation of Christianity: “It can be proved that the introduction of Christianity in to the Indian tribes has been productive of immense good. It has changed customs as old as any on the earth. It has dethroned error, and has enthroned truth” (viii). Furthermore, Copway praises the education brought to his people by whites: “Education and Christianity are to the Indian what wings are to the eagle; they elevate him; and these given to him by men of right views of existence enable him to rise above the soil of degradation, and hover about the high mounts of wisdom and truth” (viii). This final appeal, approaching hyperbole, seems to attribute all praise to the civilizing whites; however, this is not necessarily the case. A close reading of a restatement of his purpose, “to induce the pale-face to use greater effort to effect an improvement in their social and political relations” (vii), reveals a nuance of negativity. His use of the word “greater” implies that although improvements have been made by the “pale-faces” as relating to the Indians, many more are needed. Upon careful examination of ways that Copway portrays whites collectively, we may see that for each positive portrayal, there is a negative one. This shows that, first, he has not been selective in portraying

only one or the other, depending on his own experience and biases; also, in his balancing of good and bad, he displays a realistic sense of these “pale-faces.”

Commerce brought to the Ojibwe by enterprising whites is viewed by Copway both according to its benefits and its disadvantages. Copway first affirms the settling of whites, especially among the Ojibwe’s longstanding enemies, the Sioux, who, “by the good influence of the whites. . . will eventually abandon their war life” (64). On the other hand, it is also the whites who trade firearms for furs, thus providing more “efficient” means of warfare among tribes. Copway cites from William Warren’s history, that the Ojibwe ““became possessed of fire arms long before their enemies, and made good use of them”” (qtd. in Copway 70). Thus, white encroachment and commerce create tension between intra-tribal relations. Not only firearms, but domestic goods were obtained from the whites in trade for furs, which would seem advantageous for both groups. Copway, however, foresees impending dangers of this trade to the Ojibwe, even in the midst of the benefits:

Behold the change! Commerce urged on by the pale-face, strides rapidly and  
withlessly [sic] into their midst, and orders them back, back, back, to make way  
for its houses and its merchandize [sic]. Scarce is he camped, ere once again he is  
told to go farther west. When will the last order be given? When will the red-  
man have a home? (32)

Copway’s words reveal the “other” side of Manifest Destiny, which Dyer notes as the United States’ brand of colonialism enacted by enterprising whites. As a justification for the inexorable movement westward in the name of Providence and for the reason of progress, this notion epitomized “the onward and upward march of the human spirit through time, that keeps pressing

ahead into new territory” (Dyer 33). For the triumph of trade with the colonizing whites, the Ojibwe have purchased goods, but at a high cost. Here, we see a hint of the theme to which Copway (along with many other American Indian writers) will often return—displacement of his people with the accompanying problems and suffering.

Another devastating product of commerce with the whites was liquor. Copway’s comments about the decimation of tribes through warfare include results of this barter: “What war has not done, strong drink has, until now they are a weak and puny race. The pale face says that there is a fate hanging over the Indian bent on his destruction. Preposterous! They give him liquors to destroy himself with, and then charge the great Good Spirit as the author of their misery and mortality” (93-94). These words reveal not only a lament for his people but also a polemic against whites for introducing his people to liquor; like Apess, Copway calls attention to this particular product of colonialism, used as means to manipulate and control the colonized. As Loomba notes, colonialism “involved a wide range of practices including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellions” (2); certainly, the “trade” of alcohol and its use in “negotiation” are at work here. An interesting addition, however, is the colonialists’ refocusing of blame. Copway portrays whites as blaming “fate” or “the Good Spirit” for “the Indian bent on his destruction”; however, Copway and Apess, along with countless others, know better.

Despite these dire effects, however, Copway ends his chapter on warfare with a promise of “the dawning of a better day” (96), which he sees as being brought through education and Christianity. In his chapter entitled “Missions and Improvements,” he provides details about missions, which generally included schools, making the two “improvements” almost inseparable.



In addition, he notes that his tribe is willing to take advantage of these products of white civilization: “The present state of the Ojibwe [mid 1800s] renders them fully ripe and ready for great advancement in religion, literature, and the arts and sciences of civilized life. Multitudes have left their wigwams, their woods, and the attractive chase, and are now endeavoring to tread in the footsteps of the worthy white men” (172). Again, Copway’s optimism and appeal to a white audience seem exaggerated, if not unimaginable. However, he balances his bombastic claim with a tale in which not all “white men” are portrayed as “worthy.”

Recounting the story of missionary/educator Peter Jacobs, Copway offsets his praise of whites. As a child, Peter attended a camp meeting and “learned the fact that the Great Spirit despised not even the trembling prayer of the forest child” (190). He recounts that “so universal was the diffusion of the Good Spirit, that the pale face and the red man knelt together in prayer to that Great Being who makes no distinction, but between good and evil” (190-91). Touched by the spirit of the meeting, Peter jumped up on a bench and spoke the following:

“The Great Spirit has blest Peter the orphan boy. . . . Jesus died for every one. . . . My father, mother, gone; they drank fire-water, (turning to some of the traders, who were at this moment as attentive as the rest). You did not give the Indian blessed Bible; you cheated poor Indian for his furs. You kill my people. What will the Great Spirit say when he come? He will tell you, --‘You give poor Indian fire-water: you kept the Bible from poor Indian, long, long, time. *You big rascal go to Hell.*’” (191)

Out of the mouth of this young boy comes a concise critique of the dealings of many white Christians concerning the Indians. This young, Ojibwe convert to Christianity sees the

discrepancy of whites' principles and actions and boldly rebukes them. Using Peter Jones as a mouthpiece, Copway strategically censures whites. Although not as straightforward as Apess, Copway holds up his own "Indian's looking-glass for the white man."

It is interesting to note that in the previous paragraph, "Great Spirit," "Good Spirit," and "Good Being" are used as names for the Christian God. Often, a blend of names for God is evidenced in Indian writings about Christianity, as a result of "the inherent and enduring cultural value of openness to the spirituality of others and a long tradition of borrowing from one another" (Tinker 383). Such willingness to borrow aspects of the religions of tribes as they encounter one another has both helped and hindered the spreading of Christianity. The "openness to the spirituality of others" facilitated the introduction of Christian principles, yet the insistence that Indians "abandon their traditional ways in favor of a wholesale adoption of the European way" (383) was often met with resistance. Tribal religions accreted layers of spiritual beliefs over time, rather than completely replacing new beliefs with the old. Thus, as Copway tells the tale of a young Ojibwe-turned-Christian, the blend of names is natural. Moreover, Scott Michaelsen even claims that Copway's *Indian Life* tells of "precontact times, when Amerindians always already were true Christians" (118). Michaelsen bases his claim on these statements found in Copway's chapter on "Their Government," in which he does, in fact, describe the Ojibwe as a people who evinced Christian (or christian) characteristics: "Whatever we had was shared alike. In times of gladness, all partook of the joy; and when suffering came, all alike suffered. I believe communities can be governed by the pure rules of christianity, with less coercion than the laws of civilized nations, at present imposed upon their subjects" (145). Here, what Copway describes could be likened to the early Church, and his statements take on the

quality of a gentle rebuke of whites whose communities of so-called Christians adhere less to the principles taught.

Another balance of positive/negative portrayals of whites is found in the area of education, for which Copway is grateful. He comments that “if the benevolent of the United States had not given us education, many of us would have been still wandering the woods of Canada without the means of religious education. We don’t want merely blankets to cover the body,—we want Light! We want Education” (193-4)! Here, Copway views the colonizing, civilizing whites as “the benevolent of the United States.” However, later he laments some of these whites’ ways of educating the Ojibwe, which include ridicule, the whip, the curriculum, and the language. Copway states the necessity to keep silent about certain sacred traditions “because they, the whites, ridiculed it, . . . [and] ridicule should have never been used to disabuse his [the Ojibwe’s] mind of his long formed opinions. It was a fruitless way to reclaim him” (134-35). In addition, Copway notes the brutality of some white educators, calling for “schools where the whip may be dispensed with as the motive power of acquiring education” (243). Ironically, Copway, with his three years of “white” education, has a better idea of effective pedagogical methods than these whites.

Not only does he criticize the ways of educating his people, but also the content taught. Not having learned any worthwhile trade, “educated” Ojibwe found themselves with “no employment, and no income, . . . in possession of all the qualities of a gentleman, without the requisite funds to support themselves” (244). For this reason, in Copway’s final section, he proposes a revamp of education, devoted to agricultural practices. One more criticism of Copway is that whites teach “the Indians in their own language what little some have learned”

(245) rather than teaching in English. He claims, “Our language perpetuates our own ideas of civilization, as well as the old usages in our Nation; and, consequently, how limited our field of acquiring knowledge!” (245). Here, Copway is insisting on total acculturation and revocation of Native languages for English, which, by 1880, becomes the focus of the Indian boarding school system. As will be discussed with the writings of Eastman and Zitkala-Ša, this system provoked a bitterness in all those affected by it, which surfaces even today in the writings of American Indians and in their portrayals of whites. In hindsight, Copway’s suggestions for the education of his people would perhaps have been more effective.

In his last chapter, entitled “The North American Indians in General,” Copway outlines problems concerning the American Indians and the government and proposes solutions. The opening of this section reveals a slight rhetorical shift. Copway states that the information is taken from “four letters, originally addressed to the ‘Saturday Evening Post’ of Philadelphia, on the subject of Indian Civilization” (253). Adding that he has presented his plan to different state legislatures as well as to both Houses of Congress, Copway is “happy to say that there is a universal approval of this plan throughout the Union; and it is my design to request the General Government of this country that they may sooner or later take these Indians under their care, and have the credit of dealing justly with her long abused red races” (253). Finally, Copway asserts that he will continue to present his proposal until something comes of it. He pleads with his “impartial readers” to consider his argument and, if they detect any unsoundness, “let it not be laid to the weakness of the cause we advocate, but to the writer’s deficiency” (254). Thus, Copway’s audience and purpose are modified, yet remain in the framework of his larger work.

His common ground here is achieved by a section devoted to the benefits of the U. S. government if they implement his plan.

His major solution is for the government to set aside a large land grant to all tribes in the middle of the U. S., to be governed by a white Governor, an Indian Lieutenant-Governor, and a capable Secretary, either white or Indian. Chiefs of the tribes, made delegates, would meet with the government leaders, and a court of law would be instituted, made up of half whites and half Indians. All whites traveling in this land would be required to have special licenses; otherwise, they would be considered intruders. A military post would be set up “to give security to individuals who may travel or reside there; but more to keep off the *white savages*, who deal in fire water” (257). Copway also gives numerous advantages for the U. S. government, in particular economic ones resulting from the centralization of the Indians and simplification of the Indian department. The Indians would benefit from a new sense of inter-tribal community and place, an eventual common language, increased effective education, an attitude of competition in raising agricultural produce, and overall, “a rapid increase of intelligence,” resulting in steps to “be taken to have a representation in Congress” (266). Although such a proposal reveals sound reasoning and strong appeals, it is evident today that it was not implemented. Such knowledge reveals implicit portrayals of whites in government with false promises for freedom and equality; legacies of colonialism endure.

Copway has accomplished quite a feat in this work. Not only has he portrayed whites collectively, giving historical details of their actions concerning the Ojibwe, but also he has revealed his ability to strike at the roots of the problems resulting from continued colonialism. Although numerous writers, both Indian and non-Indian, have explored such problems and have

offered their own reasons for them, Copway has, in a skillful, anti-colonialist attack, devised solutions to the problems. Having begun his history with positive portrayals of whites as those who introduced Christianity and education to the Indians, he praises the pale-faces for having “dethroned error. . . and enthroned truth” (ix). Yet, as he continues his accounting of Indian/white relations with their benefits to his race, he recognizes accompanying, injurious effects of whites’ encroachment. By the time his Indian history is complete, his own history of thought has evolved to the point of pleading for rescue of his people by (white) governmental intervention. In doing so, Copway becomes a forerunner of political activism, which the next three writers will continue.

Another nineteenth-century American Indian writer, Sarah Winnemucca (later Hopkins), pleads for her people in her 1883 autobiographical work, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*. The title itself evokes a similarity to Copway’s final chapter, in which he enumerates the wrongs inflicted on his Ojibwe by the government before providing his solutions. Noted as being “the only woman writer of personal and tribal history during most of the nineteenth century” (Ruoff, *American Indian* 55), Winnemucca provides a unique perspective. In her essay, “The Frontiers of Native American Women’s Writing: Sarah Winnemucca’s *Life among the Piutes*,” Brigitte Georgi-Findlay applauds this work for its “two new angles of vision: the focus on the tribal people dispossessed by the westward movement and, more recently, on the largely ignored and for a long time invisible participation of women in this move west” (222). Equally significant are Winnemucca’s accounts of her own involvement as interpreter between her people and the U. S. government. Such a role demands an intimate knowledge of both peoples, which Winnemucca had, as noted by her white editor, Mary Mann, regarding *Life*

*among the Piutes*: “It . . . has a single aim—to tell the truth as it lies in the heart and mind of a true patriot, and one whose knowledge of the two races gives her an opportunity of comparing them justly” (3). Throughout this work, Winnemucca’s portrayals of whites testify to this fact.

In this blend “of tribal stories, personal experiences, and contemporary events” (Van Dyke 87), Winnemucca provides in-depth portrayals of the secular side of the frontier, that involving white Indian agents and the U. S. government. At times she breaks into her narrative to address the reader, presumably a white audience: “We have a republic as well as you” (Hopkins 53) and “Oh, my dear readers, talk for us, and if the white people will treat us like human beings, we will behave like a people” (244). Speaking thus to her readers, Winnemucca injects an immediacy into her words, pleading that her readers will act differently than the whites she is condemning. Her skills as orator shine through as she earnestly appeals to her audience, who, though primarily white, are, after all, fellow human beings. Whether expressed orally or in writing, Winnemucca’s work exemplifies Loomba’s claim that “literature is also an important means of appropriating, inverting or challenging dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies” (70-71). Inscribing oral stories into writing, exposing wrongs against her people, and detailing events experienced first-hand with government officials, Winnemucca challenges the whites in power with a view to bringing about change.

Initially, whites are portrayed through the stories of Winnemucca’s grandfather. He explains the origin of whites, from the beginning, when all were one happy family: ““One girl and one boy were dark and the others were white”” (Hopkins 6). The children lived together in harmony for awhile, but soon, conflicts arose. Their father, who had the power to separate the children, said, “Depart from each other, you cruel children; --go across the mighty ocean and do

not seek each other's lives. . . . And by-and-by the dark children grew into a large nation; and we believe it is the one we belong to, and that the nation that sprung [sic] from the white children will some time send some one to meet us and heal all the old trouble'" (7). Winnemucca's grandfather then asks his people to accept the white people and never to harm them. When the whites do arrive, he exclaims, "My white brothers, --my long-looked for white brothers have come at last!" (5). He welcomes them, but their refusal to reciprocate greatly disappoints him. No matter how hard he tries to make friends with them, the whites keep their distance, refusing to trust him. At this point in the narrative, Winnemucca breaks in as first-person narrator speaking in the present: "I can imagine his feelings, for I have drank [sic] deeply from the same cup. When I think of my past life, and the bitter trials I have endured, I can scarcely believe I live, and yet I do; and with the help of Him who notes the sparrow's fall, I mean to fight for my down-trodden race while life lasts" (6). Her emotional language and Biblical imagery seem as exaggerated as that of Copway when he appeals to his white audience. This is the older Winnemucca speaking, exhausted and disheartened from years of her peace-making struggles with whites, yet persistent in stirring up her audience's emotions. An important strategy for doing so is her re-establishment of the performative act of storytelling by addressing her reader-listeners directly.

As the whites continue to settle near the Paiutes, more tales are told, and the whites are portrayed as "killing everybody and eating them" (11), which, understandably, frightens the children. When the whites arrive at the camp of Sarah Winnemucca's family, her mother manages to flee with her baby on her back. Unable to carry Sarah and her other children, the mother buries them and leaves them all day long. Winnemucca notes, "Oh, can any one imagine



my feelings *buried alive*, thinking every minute that I was to be unburied and eaten by the people that my grandfather had loved so much?" (12). Although she is rescued by her mother, Sarah's fear of these people remains, regardless of her grandfather's love for them.

Returning after having helped the whites fight in California under Captain Fremont, Sarah's grandfather tells his people of all the "beautiful things their white brothers had" (18). He shows them guns, describes their clothing, and astounds them with tales of "the big houses that go on the mighty ocean" (18). To Sarah, the most wonderful thing he brings back is "a paper, which he said could talk to him. He took it out and he would talk to it, and talk with it" (18). Also, he tells the people that this paper "'can talk to all our white brothers, and our white sisters, and their children. . . . [and] can travel like the wind'" (18-9). Such a feat awes "the doctors and doctresses," who exclaim: "'If they can do this wonderful thing, they are not truly human, but pure spirits. None but heavenly spirits can do such wonderful things'" (19). Despite these marvels, however, the medicine people attempt to warn Grandfather Truckee: "'Oh, our great chieftain, we are afraid your white brothers will yet make your people's hearts bleed'" (19). Not only the children, but also the esteemed "doctors and doctresses" fear these white people with their wonders and powers; to be sure, such fears will prove to be well-founded.

It is not until after her grandfather's return that Sarah first sees these fearful white people. In addition to their pale faces, these people frighten Sarah because of the hair on their faces and their white eyes, which remind her of owls. She screams upon seeing them and dreams of "their big white eyes all night long" (25). However, once Sarah meets a nice white lady, who looks like an angel and brings medicine to soothe her face, swollen from poison oak, her fears are forgotten. She admits, "So I came to love the white people" (33). Thus, her early conceptions of

whites waver from one extreme to the other as the young girl portrays them. As she increasingly interacts with them, however, the more realistic and varied become her assessments of these people.

Living with a white family, Sarah and her sister soon learn English and the ways of these people. Calling the neighbors “our white brothers,” Sarah notes that “[a]ll these white people were loved by my people; we lived there together, and were as happy as could be. . . . in peace” (59). However, this peace is shattered by a misunderstanding of the killing of two white men. The Washoes, a neighboring tribe, are blamed since the killer had placed two Washoe arrows by the white men. The chief of the tribe, however, argues that his men had not been away from their camp. Sarah’s white neighbors, along with her brother, insist on payment for the deaths, and several days later, three Washoe men are taken to the whites to be killed. The wife of one pleads to the Great Spirit to intervene and accuses her chief of having “given innocent blood to save your people” (62). Later, when the true white killers are found, the Washoe chief asks Winnemucca’s brother to pay for the deaths of the Washoe men. Sarah writes that her brother claimed innocence of his own tribe and told the chief, ““It is you who ought to pay the poor mother and sister and wife of your own tribe, because you gave them up yourself, therefore you must not blame us. We did our duty, and we all know that the white men did nothing to us, and we did not more than what they would do for us”” (64). From this experience, Winnemucca’s portrayals of whites change from loving and peaceful to lying and hostile, although her brother’s collusion with the whites complicates the issue. Taking sides proves to be a difficult task when survival of a tribe is at stake.

With Winnemucca's knowledge of English, she becomes well-known for her role as interpreter. In traveling miles across the country to participate in this role, she encounters all kinds of whites and, rather than viewing them all collectively, distinguishes differences among smaller groups. The worst group consists of the government agents assigned to each tribe and charged with overseeing their care. For the most part, these agents cheat the people, either withholding food and clothing or making them pay for goods the government has already provided. The exception, one of the kindest whites she ever meets, is Agent Parrish. Having heard of Winnemucca's skills as interpreter, he sends for her to make clear to the Paiutes at the Malheur Agency, his plans for them. With Winnemucca's help, he is able to communicate his concern for her people:

“Now you are my children. I have come here to do you good. . . . I am not like the man who has just left you. I can't kneel down and pray for sugar and flour and potatoes to rain down, as he did. I am a bad man; but I will try and do my duty, and teach you all how to work, so you can do for yourselves by-and-by. . . . I want to teach you to do like white people.” (106-07)

Although Parrish humbly confesses that he is not a Christian like the former agent, he promises to do his best to make the Paiutes self-sufficient and ready to exist in the world of whites. He and his wife, called “our white lily mother” (117) by the Paiutes under their care, were the most beloved whites that Winnemucca encountered. Her people learn to work under Mr. Parrish, and Mrs. Parrish begins a school with Winnemucca's help. However, the Parrishes are told that they will be sent away because they are not Christians, and “all the reservations were to be under the

Christian men's care" (118). Ironically, the agent sent to replace Parrish, though called a Christian, is one of the worst whites Winnemucca encounters throughout her life.

The new Christian agent, Reinhard, proves to be prideful, abusive, deceitful, and cruel, treating the Paiutes miserably. He, too, puts them to work, but then takes their pay for items that government had already provided. When some of the people question him about this and contrast him with Parrish, Reinhard's pride erupts, and he retorts: "Go home" (126). The narrator inserts, "Then our *Christian father* again forgot himself and said, 'If you don't like the way I do, you can all leave here. I am not going to be fooled with by you. I never allow a white man to talk to me like that'" (126; emphasis added). Reinhard abuses the children, swears, and threatens to kill people. At one point, Winnemucca's brother asks, "Why talk of killing? Is that the kind of good man Mr. Parrish told us of? Of course, that is the kind of men that are *called* good,--men who talk to the Spirit Father three times a day, but who will kill us off as they would kill wild beasts" (132; emphasis added). As noted by both Apess and Copway, it is not merely the skin pigmentation of the "pale-faces" that marks them as different; it is their actions, which often reveal hypocrisy. For some, like Reinhard, their Christianity is only skin-deep while their whiteness penetrates their entire being and "colors" their actions. This agent fails to subsume his white attitude of superiority, privilege, and power under his supposedly Christian attitude of humility and love.

For Winnemucca, whiteness becomes intertwined with Christianity, the government, and wars, which is understandable considering the process of colonization. As Tinker notes in his history of missions, the conversion to Christianity of "native peoples in the Americas was the foundation for one of the primary European conquest strategies. . . [that of] *pacification*" (381).

Moreover, Tinker explains, this strategy was effected by “[t]he collusion between the missionaries and the political-military institutions of the colonizers” (381, 383). In her chapter entitled “Domestic and Social Moralities,” Winnemucca reveals evidence of such collusion:

I never saw a wardance but once. It is always the whites that begin the wars, for their own selfish purposes. The government does not take care to send the good men; there are a plenty who would take pains to see and understand the chiefs and learn their characters, and their good will to the whites. But the whites have not waited to find out how good the Indians were, and what ideas they had of God, just like those of Jesus, who called him Father, just as my people do, and told men to do to others as they would be done by, just as my people teach their children to do. (51)

The whites, as representatives of “the political-military institutions of the colonizers” are portrayed as those who initiate most wars with the Natives. Furthermore, Winnemucca discerns that the two races have more in common than is quickly decided by many agents sent by the government, who act “for their own selfish purposes,” without even attempting to know their “children.” If only these agents would take the time and effort to recognize Winnemucca’s people as individuals, conflicts could be avoided, and understanding might be attained. Instead, “almost all the agents look out for their own pockets” (136), evidencing the materialism and greed so often associated with whiteness. Finally, these whites who force Christianity onto their “charges,” take no thought of the Natives’ own religious beliefs. Winnemucca, earlier in this chapter, states that her people “are taught to love everybody” (45), and they act accordingly. In

contrast, the actions of many Christians who admonish “men to do to others as they would be done by” contradict their teachings in pursuing the colonialist conquests.

At one point in her narrative, Winnemucca’s people are ordered to be displaced “across a fearful mountain in midwinter” (205) to the Yakima reservation. Infuriated by this insensible and merciless order, Sarah expresses her bitterness to her sister: “I wish this was my last day in this cruel world. . . No, Mattie, I don’t mean the world. I mean the cruel,--yes, the cruel, wicked white people, who are going to drive us to some foreign country, away from our own” (204). Resignedly, however, she prepares her people to go. Before leaving, however, Winnemucca’s narrator breaks in to speak to her audience in her most scathing exposé of whites:

Oh, for shame! You who are educated by a Christian government in the art of war; the practice of whose profession makes you natural enemies of the savages, so called by you. Yes, you, who call yourselves the great civilization; you who have knelt upon Plymouth Rock, covenanting with God to make this land the home of the free and brave. Ah, then, you rise from your bended knees and seizing the welcoming hands of those who are the owners of this land, which you are not, your carbines rise upon the bleak shore, and your so-called civilization sweeps inland from the ocean wave; but, oh, my God! Leaving its pathway marked by crimson lines of blood, and strewn by the bones of two races, the inheritor and the invader; and I am crying out to you for justice. (207)

Here, we see the “other” side of Manifest Destiny, the violent conquest of those whose land is taken by those Christians who call themselves “the great civilization.” With these words, the embodiment of whiteness, as Dyer’s conflation of Christianity, race, and enterprise, is portrayed

at its worst. From Plymouth Rock through western “expansion,” whites have claimed “the land of the free and the home of the brave” for themselves, regardless of the cost. Winnemucca’s imagery pierces the heart of whiteness, laying it bare for all to see. She performs a reversal of her brother’s words: “[I]t is too bad the way the white people say all the time that Indians are bad, and that they have bad hearts, and that their hearts are very black” (100). It is the whites whose “hearts are very black,” and Dyer’s notion of “the basic symbolic connotation of . . . white = good and black = bad” (58) is subverted.

The only collective group of whites about which Winnemucca speaks positively is the military. Throughout her text, she often states that the soldiers are kind and caring, not at all like the agents, who just want to get rich, stealing from the Indians. Instead, the soldiers “know more about the Indians than any citizens do, and are always friendly” (93); they do not cheat the Paiutes, and pay what they promise. Winnemucca states, “The military authority is the only authority that ever paid me well for my interpreting” (215). As she nears the end of her account, Winnemucca contrasts the soldiers with the white agents: “They [agents] know if the Indians are turned over to the army, they will lose their living. In another sense they ought to be glad to have Indians (I mean all my people, who are Indian nations) under the military care, for then if we kill white people, the soldiers can just kill us right there, and not have to go all over the country to find us!” (243). Winnemucca’s logic appears to be sound even though her tone is somewhat sarcastic. Moreover, her insight into the motives of each group of whites with whom she has interacted over the years is astute. Although both groups are employed by the government, the agents exert more individual power over the Indians, often abusing it. Their role in distributing government goods provides the temptation to swindle their charges, and, in

the process, to pad their own pockets. The soldiers, on the other hand, operate as a group, whose major role is to keep the peace. Generally not sidetracked by the whites' characteristic materialism and greed, they deal fairly and compassionately with Winnemucca's people, treating them as humans, not as savage subjects.

Even when Winnemucca meets two of the most powerful whites in the U. S., President Rutherford B. Hayes and Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz, her attitudes toward whites is not softened. Pleading for her people and their land, she obtains promises in writing from these men to do right by her people. However, reports of this meeting prove to be inaccurate and the promises to be empty. Her people, used to lies from the whites, laugh, and Sarah reflects: "What could we say? We were only ashamed because we came and told them lies which the white people had told us" (225). Her uncle adds,

"My dear people, I have lived many years with the white people. Yes, it is over thirty years, and I know a great many of them. I have never known one of them do what they promised. I think they mean it just at the time, but I tell you they are very forgetful. It seems to me, sometimes, that their memory is not good. . . .

These are your white brothers' ways, and they are a weak people." (225)

This judgment against whites, one made after 30 years of direct dealings with them, reveals their deceit and disregard for the American Indians on the whole, and for this band of Paiutes specifically. Employing her uncle's words as he imputes the whites' actions to their poor memories reveals Winnemucca's own bitter sarcasm at her "white brothers' ways."

In the final portion of her narrative, Winnemucca once again interrupts her accounts of continued lies and maltreatment of the whites toward her people. She voices her final plea to the



audience: “Oh, my dear readers, talk for us, and if the white people will treat us like human beings, we will behave like a people; but if we are treated by white savages as if we are savages, we are relentless and desperate; yet no more so than any other badly treated people. Oh, dear friends, I am pleading for God and for humanity” (244). Winnemucca’s rhetoric is convincing; she establishes common ground with her readers, broadening the context of her own people’s treatment to injustice everywhere. Calling the whites “savages,” she holds up her own looking-glass to the pale-faces. Her plea for reform, however, is somewhat different from those of Apess and Copway. Apess directs his plea to sympathetic white Christians, asking them to persevere in their work until “this tree of distinction shall be leveled to the earth, and the mantle of prejudice torn from every American heart (160-61). Copway’s account ends with a plea for rescue of his people by governmental intervention. Winnemucca, using a different strategy and broader appeal, beseeches her readers on the basis of their humanity and succeeds rhetorically in expanding her vision of “justice for all.”

Despite the boldness of these and other Native activists, the latter half of the nineteenth century proved to be devastating for American Indians. The government, with its thrust toward total assimilation, “set about attacking Indian tribalism and Indian values at their core” (Porter 52). The Indian boarding school system became “a new form of war, both ideological and psychological, waged against children” (52). In addition, the Allotment or Dawes Act of 1887 was passed, putting to an end tribal ownership of land. Touted as a way to foster Indian independence, it was instead a way to separate tribal communities and make American Indians more economically dependent on the government. As such legacies of colonialism continued, so did the resistance of Native writers; however, with new problems came new strategies. Charles

Eastman and Zitkala-Ša, writing autobiographies at the beginning of a new century, struggled with tensions arising from increased methods of assimilation. Their portrayals of whites became more complex, as did their self-portrayals, results of what David Murray calls “cross-cultural complicities and contradictions” (68). The advent of anthropology with its collaboration between native informants and whites added another layer to life-writing and opened up questions of authenticity of American Indian texts. My focus here, however, is not on authenticity, but rather is on the effects of assimilation on the autobiographies of these two writers, especially as related to their portrayals of whites.

Charles Eastman (Sioux) certainly exemplifies the process of assimilation in his pair of autobiographical writings, *Indian Boyhood* (1902) and *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916). He acknowledges “the devoted cooperation” of his wife, Elaine Goodale, who also claims to have “collaborated on all of his nine books” (qtd. in Ruoff, “Old Traditions” 156). However, it is not until recently that Eastman’s books have been found to be more highly collaborative than was previously believed. Theodore D. Sargent, in *The Life of Elaine Goodale Eastman* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), has unearthed letters revealing this information. Thus, Eastman’s portrayals of whites are influenced not only by his own English education and conversion to Christianity, but also by his white wife. As Murray notes, concerning *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, “Eastman goes on to succeed in the white world. . . but he also becomes an Indian spokesman, increasingly critical of white policies, and these conflicting loyalties run through his book at all levels” (78). Therefore, his portrayals of whites reveal a tension, which, according to Murray, is never resolved. Moreover, Murray claims that Eastman “can only vacillate from one spurious ‘identity’ to another” (78). His inability to find “a means

of self-definition” (78) results from his binary oppositions of savage-civilized and Indian-white. Granted, these binaries can be seen even in the titles, with *Indian Boyhood*’s romanticizing Eastman’s “savage” past and *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*’s revealing his assimilation into the white, “civilized” world. However, Amelia Katanski, in *Learning to Write “Indian”*: *The Boarding-School Experience and American Indian Literature*, refutes such simplistic binaries to explain Eastman’s works.

Rather than being a victim of forced acculturation, as suggested by Murray, Katanski sees Eastman as one who writes from “a repertoire of identities” (152), from which he selects according to his situation. Agreeing with Hertha Wong, Katanski views the Native American concept of self as fluid, differing “from a Western (or Euro-American) idea of self in that it is more inclusive. . . . [and] also dynamic; that is, it is in process, not fixed” (Wong, qtd. in Katanski 135). In addition, with changes in context, the Native self-concept changes, and Katanski points out that the turn of the century was a “time of accelerated change” (164) for American Indians. Therefore, rather than being described as “trapped between two worlds” (15), as many scholars state, Katanski maintains that “they inhabited several worlds simultaneously” (164). Each “world” necessitated a different aspect of identity that was then articulated differently. Scholars such as Murray seek to determine identity from the form and style of writing, but Katanski wishes to “decouple form and identity” (139). Rather, she applies “Paul Kroskrity’s model of the repertoire of identity” (135) to the boarding-school-era writers, emphasizing their agency. Furthermore, she focuses on discerning how and why these writers choose certain identities, depending on the situation. Thus, the term “vacillate” does not apply, nor do the binaries of choices. These writers live and write in what Homi Bhabha terms the

“beyond”; although writing almost a century later, Bhabha’s “*fin de siecle*” notions apply here, too:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity. (1-2)

Certainly, Eastman writes from these “in-between” spaces and is not restricted to one or the other binary; instead, he employs Katakaski’s “repertoire of identities” as his means of “elaborating strategies of selfhood” (Bhabha 2). Such strategies affect not only his self-portrayals but also the ways he portrays whites.

In Eastman’s autobiographical writings, as in those of Copway and Winnemucca, his attitudes toward whites change according to his experiences with them over time. *Indian Boyhood*, the account of his childhood, begins with his infancy, the death of his mother, and the capture and supposed murder of his father and two brothers by the “Washechu (white men)” (14). Although Eastman knows that he must one day avenge the deaths of his family members, he lives through his childhood with little contact with whites, only hearing of them through stories. Playing “white man” with his friends involves trading goods for furs while picturing this man with a pale complexion, short hair, and “long hair on his face” (72). Eastman praises his childhood in the wilderness, where he and his fellow Sioux “did not have any of the luxuries of civilization. . . . [but] lived in blessed ignorance of any life that was better than our own” (214). This contentment, Eastman notes later, “reigned absolute, in a fashion which I have never

observed among the white people, even in the best of circumstances” (216). As time passes and whites continue to encroach on Indian lands, he learns more about these people “whose wholesale methods of destruction wrought such havoc with the [buffalo] herds. These seemingly intelligent animals correctly prophesied to the natives the approach of the pale face” (252).

With their approach, Eastman’s tale of his boyhood draws to a close. In his final chapter, he recounts his uncle’s descriptions of whites and his people’s feelings concerning them: “In some things we despised them; in others we regarded them as *wakan* (mysterious), a race whose power bordered upon the supernatural” (280). These powers included guns and trains, and Eastman asks his uncle “why the Great Mystery gave such power to the Washechu (the rich)—sometimes we called them by this name—and not to us Dakotas” (281). His uncle responds, ““For the same reason. . . that he gave the Duta [Dakota] the skill to make fine bows and arrows, and to Wachesne [whites] no skill to make anything”” (282). Then the uncle states his own impressions and portrayals of these rich whites, including their attempt to measure everything (even time), to pay money to the government for their personal goods, and to make people slaves, whom “they painted . . . black a long time ago, to tell them from the rest” (282). Perhaps his most telling and accurate observation about whites is that “[t]he greatest object of their lives seems to be to acquire possessions—to be rich. They desire to possess the whole world”” (282). All of these descriptions give Eastman his “first clear idea of the white man” (282).

When Eastman reaches the age of fifteen, his uncle presents him with a flint-lock gun, and Eastman decides it is time to avenge his father’s and brother’s deaths by the whites. Soon after his self-imposed training in assuming his “position as a man” (285), Eastman’s father returns, having been imprisoned, not killed, and converted to Christianity. Later pardoned and

released, Eastman's father was finally able to search for and find his son, who was out hunting upon his father's arrival. Eastman recounts that, upon seeing his son return, his father "was eager to embrace the child . . . [and] could not remain in the teepee and watch the boy coming, so he started to meet him" (287). In a reverse Prodigal-Son-type reunion, Eastman describes the scene, which includes his uncle's explanation: "My boy, this is your father, my brother, whom we mourned as dead. He has come for you" (287). Instead of the Prodigal son's return to his father and old way of life, Eastman's father returns to his son to take him away to a new, white way of life. At the close of his *Indian Boyhood*, Eastman dons "civilized clothing," leaves with his father, and states, "all my old ideas were to give place to new ones, and my life was to be entirely different from that of the past" (288). At this point, Eastman's father becomes a "white" man's looking-glass for his Indian son; Eastman sees how he is supposed to look, according to white civilization.

*From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916) begins as *Indian Boyhood* ends with his father's return, forming a transition, an "in-between" space providing "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood" (Bhabha 1). From this space, Eastman consciously chooses to portray a "selfhood" that befits his new life. Katanski contends that Eastman's romanticized descriptions of *Indian Boyhood* serve "not to reflect an authentic, unassimilated Indianness, but to show that any Indian is as capable of success in the white world as he has been" (134). Then, as he ventures *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, Eastman chooses to write as a successfully assimilated Indian. However, as his situations change, so must his self-representations, but rather than vacillating from merely an Indian-savage identity to a white-civilized one, as Murray claims, he makes the first of many choices from his "repertoire of identities" (Katanski 140).

Understandably, Eastman is slow at being convinced by his father's continual praise for the superiority of the whites' civilization: "The Great Mystery has shown to the red and white man alike the good and evil, from which to choose" (28). Here, we see supposedly simplistic choices, which Eastman is not yet ready to make. He recalls his grandmothers' warnings of the whites' "made-up life" (29), yet he also recalls her advice: "When you see a new trail, or a footprint that you do not know, follow it to the point of knowing" (28). In fact, it is this analogy of a "new trail" that Eastman's father also uses: "The way of knowledge . . . is like our old way in hunting. You begin with a mere trail—a footprint. If you follow that faithfully, it may lead you to a clearer trail—a track—a road. Later on there will be many tracks, crossing and diverging one from the other. Then you must be careful, for success lies in the choice of the right road" (29). With these words, Eastman's life seems to be laid out before him, and he chooses the white tracks. However, he soon discovers that these tracks are not straight; they become "many tracks, crossing and diverging one from the other," and require many more choices. Eastman's identity is not based on the binaries of his father, nor is his father's reflection identical to the son's.

As Eastman begins his travels, he tells of his unsettling encounter with a white man and his family, which makes a deep impression on his own views of whites. Invited to eat supper with these strange whites, Eastman feels uncomfortable and shocked when the father strikes "the table with the butt of his knife with such a force that I jumped and was within an ace of giving a war-whoop" (36). However, this only proves to be the signal to say grace before the meal. After dining, Eastman offers the man all the money he has, but is turned down. Later that night, while sleeping out of doors, Eastman is entranced by the music of a melodeon and joins the family

singing hymns. The next day he witnesses the farmer working, and “[w]ith sleeves rolled up, face and hands blackened and streaming with sweat, I [Eastman] thought he looked not unlike a successful warrior just returned from the field of battle” (38). By the time he departs, Eastman has modified his view of whites by this personal encounter with this kind man and his family, an experience which begins his softening toward white civilization.

Eastman excels in his educational endeavors and converts to “the greatness of Christian civilization. . . . [which he sees] as the development of every natural resource; the broad brotherhood of mankind; the blending of all languages and the gathering of all races under one religious faith” (57). In addition, he graduates from Dartmouth College and attends Boston University, where he studies medicine, the field in which he believes he can best serve his race. He is first assigned to the Pine Ridge agency in the fall of 1890, just a few months before the Wounded Knee massacre. Concerning this peculiar position, Eastman writes: “In 1890 a ‘white doctor’ who was also an Indian was something of a novelty, and I was afterward informed that there were many and diverse speculations abroad as to my success or failure in this new rôle” (76). Katanski contends that “his assignment to the reservation was a homecoming with a twist” (142), and “his multiple identities were highly visible” (141). Returning to his own people yet in the roles of educated doctor and governmental employee, “Eastman constantly crossed between identities that for others were drawn like lines in the sand” (142). In these “crossings,” Eastman tries to use his white education to help his own people, yet in doing so, sees negligence and malevolence of whites, especially those in the government, toward the Indians.

Devoting a chapter in *From the Deep Woods* to “The Ghost Dance War,” Eastman reveals the religious fervor of the preparation for this pan-tribal dance, advocated by Wovoka,



the Indian Messiah. This event was prophesied to bring about the end of the white man, who attempted to thwart it using any means possible. Eastman, from his first-hand vantage point, sees numerous causes leading up to the massacre:

Rations had been cut from time to time; the people were insufficiently fed, and their protests and appeals were disregarded. Never was more ruthless fraud and graft practiced upon a defenseless people than upon these poor natives by the politicians! . . . Sickness was prevalent and the death rate alarming, especially among the children. Trouble from all these causes had for some time been developing, but might have been checked by humane and conciliatory measures.

(99)

However, such measures are not taken, and the Ghost Dance gathering of thousands of Sioux near Pine Ridge becomes the site of mayhem, all described vividly by Eastman. He notes, “All this was a severe ordeal for one who had so lately put all his faith in the Christian love and lofty ideals of the white man. Yet I passed no hasty judgment, and was thankful that I might be of some service and relieve even a small part of the suffering” (114). Acknowledging his multiple identities, Eastman struggles to reconcile the Christian principle of love, as taught by whites, with this horrific scene. Nevertheless, he consciously shifts to his identity as needed in this situation, and as doctor and Sioux, and works feverishly to help his people.

After the Wounded Knee massacre, Eastman persists in quelling rumors and tales “of wrongs, real or fancied, committed by responsible officials on the reservation, or by their connivance” (118). In addition, he confesses, “At that time, I had not dreamed what American politics really is, and I had the most exalted admiration for our noted public men” (118).

Shifting identities as needed, he continues serving his people and working with government agents, but his “exalted admiration” erodes. He witnesses firsthand the fraudulent practices by agents and addresses these wrongs, only to be reprimanded or transferred. Finally, he becomes “utterly disillusioned and disgusted with these revelations of Government mismanagement in the field. . . . [and remarks that] these men will not hesitate to manufacture evidence against a man’s, or a woman’s, personal reputation in order to attain their ends” (134). Although slow in attributing blame to whites and the government, he does learn, through experience, that such blame must be ultimately given. Yet, as Katanski notes, he is “unwilling to discard entirely one of his identities to immerse himself in another” (153). Working later as a lobbyist, Eastman admits, “I had overmuch faith in the civilized ideal, and I was again disappointed” (155). Even with such shattered illusions about the government, however, Eastman perseveres in trying to convince his people “of the sincerity of his white friends, and that conflicts between the two races have been due as much to mutual misunderstandings as to the selfish greed of the white man” (182). Still unwilling to place total blame on whites, Eastman nonetheless finds it difficult to understand how Christians can act in the ways he has witnessed.

As a field representative for instituting the Y. M. C. A. in Indian tribes, Eastman spends time learning about missionary efforts of Protestants among his people. Having observed Christians for a number of years, he wonders why “much church-going among white and nominally Christian Indians led often to such very small results” (141). Then, he is struck with the realization that white Christianity “was a machine-made religion. It was supported by money, and more money could only be asked for on the showing made; therefore too many of the workers were after quantity rather than quality of religious experience” (141). In contrast,

Eastman recalls the words of an old warrior, who proclaimed that the Indians had always followed this (Christian) way of life: ““We owned nothing, because everything is from Him. Food was free, land free as sunshine and rain. Who has changed all this? The white man; and yet he says he is a believer in God! He does not seem to inherit any of the traits of his Father, nor does he follow the example set by his brother Christ”” (142). As noted by Katanski, Eastman “begins to associate Christian behavior with Dakota culture in opposition to a European American culture, which continually falls short of Christian ideals” (153). His ability to shift identities allows him to view both Christianity and his native religion from an insider’s perspective. Eastman finds similarities in belief, but in not in practice of these beliefs. Like Apess, Copway, and Winnemucca, his greatest charge against Christianity is the ways many whites do not practice the principles they teach. He does recognize that this charge applies only to “the nation as a whole and to the majority of its people, not to individual Christians” (151). Thus, his portrayal of white Christians is qualified, his discernment sharpened; his ability to shift identities according to situations allows him to distinguish the individual from the collective.

As for white civilization overall, Eastman concludes that it is “a system of life based upon trade. The dollar is the measure of value, and *might* still spells *right*; otherwise, why war?” (194). However, Eastman adds, “Yet even in deep jungles God’s own sunlight penetrates, and I stand before my own people still as an advocate of civilization” (194-95). The final lines of *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* articulate Eastman’s choices of identities:

I am an Indian; and while I have learned much from civilization, for which I am grateful, I have never lost my Indian sense of right and justice. I am for development and progress along social and spiritual lines, rather than those of

commerce, nationalism, or material efficiency. Nevertheless, so long as I live, I am an American. (195)

Framing his conclusion with “I am an Indian” and “I am an American,” Eastman does not vacillate from one to the other, but rather reveals his spaces “in-between.” He accepts the flaws of whiteness, along with some of its merits. He acknowledges the worth of his education and of “development and progress,” yet chooses not to use these tools for individual, material gain. He retains his own “Indian sense of right and justice” while affirming his American-ness. As Katanski concludes her section on Eastman, she reiterates her claim that “Eastman’s various self-representations are not. . . contradictory but are deployed for differing purposes” (153). The primary purpose, Katanski contends, is that “of proving the Indian’s potential for survival through assimilation in the years immediately following the horror of Wounded Knee” (153). Met with a multitude of conflicting situations throughout his life, Eastman exercises agency as he chooses “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (Bhabha 1). Through his years of living with whites, he learns how to articulate *their* “cultural differences” and to portray them fairly and honestly.

Another early American Indian nonfiction writer, sharing similar concerns as Eastman, is Gertrude Bonnin (Yankton Sioux), who re-named herself Zitkala-Ša. Katanski notes that even though both writers share a similar repertoire of identities, Zitkala-Ša chooses differently (154). The act of self-naming reveals Zitkala-Ša’s focus on choices that foreground the individual Indian (Sioux) over the white. From a childhood steeped in her mother’s bitter hatred of “the paleface,” Zitkala-Ša’s life is marked by a continuing bitterness toward whites. However, she

chooses to travel East, to Indian boarding school, against her mother's wishes. Her 1921 publication *American Indian Stories*, includes autobiographical writings beginning with her "Indian Childhood" and moving through her days as a boarding-school student and then teacher. Following these life writings are reflections upon religion, works of fiction, and her own take on "America's Indian Problem." Throughout all, Zitkala-Ša portrays whites as she comes into close contact with them, never quite letting go of her initial bitterness but realizing the need for their readership. She indefatigably works for recognition of her people's needs brought about by whites' injustices.

Some of Zitkala-Ša's earliest memories arise from her mother, who, although having "been married to three different white men" (Fisher ix), decries "the paleface [who] has stolen our lands and driven us hither" (10). Following this encroachment of whites with forced displacement of her people, Zitkala-Ša's sister and uncle died, tragedies that her mother always blamed on "the paleface." As a child, Zitkala-Ša recalls her own words, as she witnessed her mother's tears: "I hate the paleface that makes my mother cry" (9). Despite this hatred, Zitkala-Ša, tempted by the desire of her friend Judéwin to go East with the missionaries, asks permission of her mother. The response to her daughter proves to be an accurate one: "There! I knew you were wishing to go, because Judéwin has filled your ears with the white man's lies. Don't believe a word they say! Their words are sweet, but, my child, their deeds are bitter" (40-41). Yet, despite her mother's warnings, Zitkala-Ša prays to the Great Spirit to change her mother's mind and the next day sees a change. Her mother, prompted by Zitkala-Ša's aunt, who says, "Let her try it" (44), hands down her decision:

“Yes, . . . my daughter. . . will need an education when she is grown, for then there will be fewer real Dakotas, and many more palefaces. . . who owe us a large debt for stolen lands, [and] have begun to pay a tardy justice in offering some education to our children. But I know my daughter must suffer keenly in this experiment.” (44)

Zitkala-Ša’s mother sees in her “Indian’s looking-glass” a darkened reflection of the whites’ deeds; in addition, she “sees” through the glass darkly into the future, predicting only more suffering. Her last words to her daughter were to ring true, because soon after Zitkala-Ša loses sight of her mother, on her way east to school, she is filled with regret and fear. Although her experiences with “the paleface” were not as tragic as those of her mother, in that they did not result in deaths of loved ones, they instilled in Zitkala-Ša similar emotions of bitter enmity.

Through Zitkala-Ša’s accounts of Indian boarding school, we see collective portrayals of the whites involved in this endeavor. It was whites who forced the speaking of English, the sounds of which, to Zitkala-Ša’s ears, made “a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless” (52). Whites also cut the hair of the students, and from Zitkala-Ša’s comments regarding this act, we are shown why this was so devastating: “Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!” (54). Time after time, Zitkala-Ša recounts that she resisted, was punished, and suffered indignities, yet a “mischievous spirit of revenge possessed [her]” (59). Moreover, this means of educating Indian children included Christianizing, as was generally the case, and Zitkala-Ša resists Christianity with this same “mischievous spirit.” Of all

teachings about the whites' religion, the most vivid to her is that of the devil: "I never knew there was an insolent chieftain among the bad spirits, who dared to array his forces against the Great Spirit, until I heard this white man's legend from a paleface woman" (62). After seeing a picture of this horrifying "king of evil spirits" (62), Zitkala-Ša witnesses her teacher's fear tactics to "inspire" Indian children to believe and obey: "Then I heard the paleface woman say that this terrible creature roamed loose in the world, and that little girls who disobeyed school regulations were to be tortured by him" (62-3). Rather than acting in fear of "the white man's devil" (62), however, Zitkala-Ša finds his picture in a Bible and scratches out his eyes with a slate pencil, making a hole in the page, enacting her own form of resistance. As Ania Loomba notes, "Historically speaking, anti-colonial resistances have taken many forms, and they have drawn upon a wide variety of resources" (185); armed with nothing but a Bible and a pencil, Zitkala-Ša vehemently makes a statement. Although most likely known only to herself, this act undoubtedly fills her with satisfaction.

As Zitkala-Ša grows in age and experience, her collective portrayals of whites do not get any less disparaging, nor does her disdain for Christianity. In her chapter "The Iron Routine," she states, "From happy dreams of Western rolling lands and unlassoed freedom we tumbled out upon chilly bare floors back again into a paleface day" (65). She suffers silently as she trudges through each day in the grasp of "the civilizing machine" (66), knowing that the paleface teacher cannot see the pain of her students. When a classmate lies dying and Zitkala-Ša visits her, she hears the girl's talking "disconnectedly of Jesus the Christ and the paleface who was cooling her swollen hands and feet" (67). This infuriates Zitkala-Ša, who bitterly blames the "ignorant woman who was inculcating in our hearts her superstitious ideas" (67). She decides that her

own energies would be best spent working for her race and becomes a teacher at Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Choosing from her “repertoire of identities,” Zitkala-Ša works as a part of the “civilizing machine,” but seeks to sabotage it, enacting her own “strategy of selfhood.”

In this capacity, she soon discovers firsthand more examples of the hypocrisy of whites. Sent back to her homeland to recruit Indian students, she finds that many changes have occurred because of whites on the land, and her mother is more contemptuous than ever: “My daughter, beware of the paleface. . . . who offers in one palm the holy papers, and with the other gives a holy baptism of firewater. He is the hypocrite who reads with one eye, “Thou shalt not kill,” and with the other gloats upon the sufferings of the Indian race” (93-94). Once again, whites, especially those who call themselves Christians, are portrayed as cruel, insensitive hypocrites. Furthermore, Zitkala-Ša learns that hypocrisy extends to other whites, whether Christian or not: The hypocrisy of the administrators, as well as of the government representatives sent to inspect the school see only “the students’ sample work *made* for exhibition” (96). Zitkala-Ša does recognize that a few noble whites exist and work for her race, but she finds herself “in no mood to strain my eyes in searching for latent good in my white co-workers” (96). Wearing from her efforts to fight against educational ills inflicted on her people by whites, she resigns her teaching post and embarks on her own studies.

In retrospect, Zitkala-Ša reflects on her “white” educational experiences, and we see her ability to shift identities, according to the exigencies of her situation. She has gained a new perspective and can see “beyond”:

Now as I look back upon the recent past, I see it from a distance, as a whole. I remember how, from morning till evening, many specimens of civilized peoples



visited the Indian school. The city folks with canes and eyeglasses, the countrymen with sunburnt cheeks and clumsy feet, forgot their relative social ranks in an ignorant curiosity. Both sorts of these Christian palefaces were alike astounded at seeing the children of savage warriors so docile and industrious. . . . [and left] well satisfied: they were educating the children of the red man! They were paying a liberal fee to the government employees in whose able hands lay the small forest of Indian timber. (98)

Thus, she sees these whites duped into thinking that they were successful at “civilizing” the Indian by seeing only a veneer of goodness, hiding the emotional pain and sorrow of the children. Continuing her thoughts, Zitkala-Ša notes that “[i]n this fashion many have passed idly through the Indian schools during the last decade, afterward to boast of their charity to the North American Indian. But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization” (98-9). As one who has access to a “repertoire of identities,” depending on the situation, Zitkala-Ša see through the pretense of whites’ attempts at “civilization.” From her first-hand observations, she discerns the appeasement of whites’ guilt by visiting Indian boarding schools and leaving satisfied with the good works being done for these deprived children. Furthermore, as a participant in the implementation of this system, she is keenly aware of its superficiality. Finally, armed with this knowledge, she adopts her traditional identity as Sioux, and questions the long-term effects and costly sacrifices of civilization.

One sacrifice she refuses to make is her own acceptance of Christianity. To the chagrin of “those at the Carlisle Indian School where she had taught from 1898-99, . . . she was an

anathema. . . . [for] writing embarrassing articles such as ‘Why I Am a Pagan’” (Fisher viii). The exact words of this article, with the exception of the last line, are included in “The Great Spirit,” in *American Indian Stories*. Here, she extols the beauty of nature, reaffirms her Indian religion and values, along with her feeling of acceptance of all “fellow-creatures,” regardless of race:

“The racial lines, which once were bitterly real, now serve nothing more than marking out a living mosaic of human beings. And even here men of the same color are like the ivory keys of one instrument where each resembles all the rest, yet varies from them in pitch and quality of voice” (Zitkala-Ša 104). With such inclusive love for all, the narrator then readily greets “the solemn-faced ‘native preacher,’ . . . though he mouth most strangely the jangling phrases of a bigoted creed” (105). This Christianized Indian attempts to convert the narrator, but without success. Upon his departure, the narrator reminds herself, “Still I would not forget that the pale-faced missionary and the hoodooed aborigine are both God’s creatures, though small indeed their own conceptions of Infinite Love” (107). This love is then manifested to the narrator, not by the Christian God, but by the Great Spirit, in whose robe are caught “the spangles and oscillating brilliants of sun, moon, and stars” (107). Thus ends the chapter in *American Indian Stories*, but the last line, found only in the original, reads as follows: “If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan” (“Why” 803). In revealing such inclusive benevolence towards all beings, perhaps Zitkala-Ša is contrasting her “pagan” practices with those of white, so-called Christians who profess “good will toward men.” Her choice of identity is apparent.

Her disdain for whites’ religion and frustration with whites’ form of education project Zitkala-Ša into her career in political activism for her people. As secretary of the Society of the

American Indian, she moves to Washington, D. C., with her husband in 1916, where she campaigns “across the country for Indian citizenship, employment of Indians in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, equitable settlement of tribal land claims, and stabilization of laws relating to Indians” (Fisher xv). The last chapter of *American Indian Stories*, entitled “America’s Indian Problem,” begins with a brief history of Indian/white relations from the time of contact. Then, Zitkala-Ša provides evidence of in-depth research into the government’s treatment of the Indians. Beginning with the hated concept of wardship, which “is no substitute for citizenship” (187), moving to the demand for settlement of treaties, Zitkala-Ša examines the flaws in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. One notable finding is that “there was no digest of the provisions of statutes and treaties with Indian tribes governing Indian funds and the trust obligations of the government” (188). However, such a digest (of 300 pages) was later prepared, then stored “in a dark closet” (190). Pushing for this information to be made accessible and for financial fraudulent practices of the Indian Service to be exposed, Zitkala-Ša concludes, “All the machinery of government has been set to work to repress rather than to provide adequate means for justly dealing with a large population which had no political rights” (195). Thus, Zitkala-Ša ends her book with harsh portrayals of whites, especially those in the government. An interesting note is that, in reprinting this book in 1976, the Rio Grande Press excluded this final essay yet included it in the “Table of Contents” (Lewis 97). Reasons for this “error” can only be surmised. The fact remains that Zitkala-Ša used her skills in public speaking and in writing, instilled by white schools, for the betterment of the American Indians for the rest of her life.

Each of these early American Indian writers of nonfiction can be viewed as presenting collective portrayals of whites by building upon, at least implicitly, Apess’s “Indian’s looking-

glass for the white man.” William Apess initiates the metaphor, “playing” with reflections of exteriority while simultaneously scrutinizing interiority. An early “product” of white education and religion, he openly exposes failures of whites to act out their own civilizing (specifically, Christianizing) teachings. George Copway, beginning his history with affirmations of the benefits of whites to the Ojibwe, ends with his perceptive grasp of the problematic results. Through his evolution of thought concerning whites’ influences on Indians, he shows first a positive side, then a negative. Through his two-way “looking-glass,” he allows whites to see the ramifications of their wrongs, but also some possible political solutions. Sarah Winnemucca holds up her own “looking-glass” and “reverses the gaze by reminding whites of their own brutality” (Ruoff, “Reversing” 216). The looking-glass of Charles Eastman resembles a two-way mirror, as he both sees and shows whites from opposing “sides.” He chooses not to conform completely to his father’s reflection, viewing whites and their civilizing influences from their side of the looking-glass; instead, he finds himself catching glimpses from the other side, revealing the evils of whiteness. As for Zitkala-Sa, she perpetuates her mother’s looking-glass for the whites, viewing whites as though “through a glass darkly,” focusing almost exclusively on their malevolence.

All of these writers form a part of what Craig Womack calls “our ancestral voices, the pioneers, those who came before us whose writings paved the way for what Native authors can do today” (3). To be sure, these writers mastered the art of writing English to such an extent that their rhetorical strategies equal those of American Indian writers today. From their creative ways of adapting to the forced language, religion, education, and government of whites, these writers have elaborated “strategies of selfhood. . . [and] initiate[d] new signs of identity, and

innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation” (Bhabha 1-2). In addition, their content reveals “the evolution of Native thought that has led up to contemporary notions of sovereignty and literature” (Womack 3). Finally, from their groundwork on collective portrayals of whites, we see not only legacies of colonialism and fruits of racism, but also distinctive differences of narrower categories of these whites. The next chapters will build from this foundation, focusing on fictional portrayals of whites as they have interacted collectively and individually with America’s first inhabitants. These peoples have not at all vanished, as was projected in the nineteenth century; rather, through their strength, dignity, courage, and “spirit,” they have survived.

## CHAPTER 2

### EXPOSING WHITENESS: COLLECTIVE PORTRAYALS OF WHITES IN FICTIONAL WORKS OF SILKO, ERDRICH, AND HOGAN

In *The Voice in the Margin* (1989), Arnold Krupat reflects upon America's avoidance of admitting to a pre-contact history, "as if America was indeed 'virgin land,' empty, uninhabited, silent, dumb until the Europeans brought the plow and the pen to cultivate its wilderness" (3). Such omission or erasure of thousands of years of tribal cultures seems astonishing, but, when we examine mainstream history books of over forty years ago, we will see this tendency. Occasionally, a paragraph may be dedicated to those "Others" who lived here long before Columbus or any other explorers had an inkling that there was a "New World," but for the most part, facts of the lives of these Others were repressed. However, as Krupat notes, "there is always a return of the repressed in one form or another: and now it is no longer possible to pretend the Other is simply silent or absent because the formerly conquered *write*—as they *fight*—back" (3-4; emphasis added).

In Chapter One, we have examined some examples of this "writing" and "fighting back" in the early American Indian nonfiction writers William Apess, George Copway, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Charles Eastman, and Zitkala-Ša. In addition to written historical accounts of Indian/white encounters and their effects, these writers have "passed down an important intellectual tradition built not only on the last thirty years or so" (Womack 2). These "last thirty years or so" refer to "the steady rise in literary production by Native American writers often termed 'The Native American Renaissance'" (Ruppert, "Fiction" 173). Although initiated

by N. Scott Momaday's 1969 Pulitzer Prize for his 1968 novel *House Made of Dawn*, this "renaissance" does not "imply that Native writers were not producing significant work before that time or that these writers sprang up without longstanding community and tribal roots" (173), some of which have been discussed in Chapter One.

Building upon this foundation of autobiography and history, American Indian writers of fiction have invented ways of incorporating heretofore silenced history into their literary works. Nancy Peterson, in "History, Postmodernism, and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," states that "for writers such as Erdrich, a part-Chippewa woman, the history of America has often been exclusionary—a monologic narrative of male Anglo-American progress that constructs others as people without history. Writing history (as historical novels and in other forms) has thus become one way for marginalized peoples to counter their invisibility" (983). Accordingly, many twentieth-century American Indian writers incorporate shards of history in their fictional works, while some, such as Robert Conley (Cherokee) and LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), devote themselves to writing (Indian) historical novels.

One benefit of such (re)writing of history is that many readers, especially whites, may learn for the first time of major historical events concerning Indian/white relations. These fictional works become "the textual equivalent of the 'frontier'" (Krupat, *Native* 4), where white readers encounter not only "Others" but also "other" accounts of history, quite different from that of the mainstream. In addition, American Indian fiction writers, in revealing their own histories, become "active agents in history, innovators of new ways, of Indian ways, of being and speaking and authoring in this world created by colonial contact" (Womack 6). Certainly, some of the nineteenth-century American Indian nonfiction writers made great strides in actively

confronting such a world while attempting to conform to white readers. In the twentieth century, however, American Indian fiction writers have developed increasingly innovative ways to tell their stories, create their identities, and along the way, enlighten readers of nonwestern worldviews. In addition, these writers have crafted complex ways of crossing cultural boundaries, of bringing non-Indian readers into a “textual frontier” controlled, this time, by Indians. Whites, accepted as a given in “this world created by colonial contact,” are portrayed collectively sometimes subtly, other times conspicuously, but, I contend, always strategically, by these “active agents in history.” Such collective portrayals most often reveal whiteness at its worst, once the whitewashed history of American colonialism is truly told. Therefore, to appeal to white readers, American Indian writers craft their white characters carefully, devising strategies to prevent alienating their audiences.

Such strategies must, of course, be carried out in the language of the colonizers, who, from the time of contact, forced their own tongues upon the Native peoples. As Catherine Rainwater notes, in *Dreams of Fiery Stars*, white European explorers immediately set up unequal power relations by their use of language to which the Native inhabitants were unable to respond, at least initially (1-2). Thus, in addition to Richard Dyer’s point that whites’ spirit of enterprise allows them to organize “white flesh and in turn non-white flesh and other material matters” (15), white explorers also “organized” the means of communication. However, one consequence of colonialism is that the colonized devise methods of resistance, which certainly occurred in America. Over time, after having had English force-fed to them in boarding schools and other white educational systems, American Indians acquired this language and learned how to use it for their own purposes. In their anthology entitled *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, Joy



Harjo (Creek) and Gloria Bird (Spokane) discuss this process: “When our lands were colonized the language of the colonizer was forced on us. We had to use it for commerce in the new world, a world that evolved through the creation and use of language. It was when we began to create with this new language that we named it ours, made it usefully tough and beautiful” (23-24).

Learning “to create with this new language” and to make it “usefully tough and beautiful” required strategies that twentieth-century American Indian writers have mastered. As Rainwater states, “Native American writers today employ the self-conscious language games of the colonizers in pursuit of their own ends” (xiii-xiv). These “games” involve instructing their (white) readers as to historical events and details, this time from an Indian perspective. In addition, these writers not only “revise the record of the past but the shape of the future, by reinscribing the audience with new rules for constructing self and world” (xii). Along with “new rules” come higher stakes, as noted by Ruth Frankenberg in *Displacing Whiteness*: “[T]he ‘revealing’ of the unnamed—the exposure of whiteness masquerading as universal” (3) opens up the possibility of risk. Unmasking the history of how “white dominance is rationalized, legitimized, and made ostensibly normal and natural” (3) threatens whites’ power. Thus, American Indian writers must strategically portray whites in their fictional works to prevent alienating white readers yet, at the same time, to displace them from their dominant positions.

In achieving this exposure and displacement of whiteness, these writers reveal ways that theoretical underpinnings concerning race and postcolonialism are played out. As Frankenberg states, white studies have “begun to map out the salience of whiteness to the formation of nationhood, class, and empire in the United States. . . . [as well as] to the sociopolitical processes inherent in taking land and making nations” (2). The rationale for such “salience of whiteness”

throughout history is articulated by Richard Dyer in *White*. Here, he expounds upon Harriet Beecher Stowe's use of the term "enterprising" to describe white men's "daring. . . and steadfastness, their capacity to organize, their hardness and also their rapacity" (31). It is this spirit of "enterprise" that Dyer sees as being embodied specifically in whites, and which allows them to justify their entitlement of control over others (non-whites): "'Enterprise' is an aspect of both spirit itself—energy, will, ambition, the ability to think and see things through—and of its effect—discovery, science, business, wealth creation, the building of nations, the organisation of labour (carried out by racially lesser humans)" (31). The vehicle for the exercise of enterprise is colonialism, which, in the United States, evolved into the term "Manifest Destiny" (33). Clinging to this noble cause, whites moved inexorably westward, taking land from the Natives as well as creating wealth for themselves, all in the spirit of enterprise.

Aspects of colonialism/Manifest Destiny pervade the literatures of those whose land was taken, from the time of contact through today. Although in the late twentieth century, the term "colonialism" has often been preceded with "post," implying that colonialism has ended, Ania Loomba, in *Colonialism-Postcolonialism*, explains the difference: "It has been suggested that it is more helpful to think of post-colonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (12). Thus, we see in much of American Indian literature of today the effects, or "legacies of colonialism," along with "the contestation of colonial domination" by acts of resistance and adaptation. Certainly, some of these effects include what Loomba notes as the "appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and

cultural structures of another territory or nation” (6). Intertwined with the “appropriation of material resources” is capitalism, as Loomba explains:

[A]lthough European colonialisms involved a variety of techniques and patterns of domination, . . . all of them produced the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry. Thus, we could say that colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism. (4)

Finally, with the birth and growth of capitalism, comes materialism, which fuels greed, a characteristic often found in collective portrayals of whites by American Indian writers.

Although most fictional works by American Indian writers contain white characters who enact a multitude of “legacies of colonialism,” I have selected three exemplary novels to analyze for their collective portrayals of whites. All of these major writers “employ language games of the colonizers in pursuit of their own ends” (Rainwater xiii-xiv). Although “their own ends” may vary somewhat, all involve portraying whites collectively as they have encroached upon tribal lives and cultures. In *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna) weaves “[t]he distinctive New Mexico landscapes; the Laguna and Navajo concepts of storytelling, place, ritual, and community” (Roemer, “Silko’s Arroyos” 226), into an intricate web of history and her own origin story of whites. Also concerned with history, Louise Erdrich (Ojibwa), in *Tracks*, describes “the first decades of the twentieth century. . . when the Chippewa began to see with a grim finality the last portion of their traditional lives slipping rapidly away” (Owens 212). Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), in *Mean Spirit*, tells the history of the Oklahoma oil-boom, when the Osages were manipulated and murdered by oil- and money-hungry whites. In the telling of all of

these histories/stories, these writers portray whites strategically, striving to make their works accessible to multiple audiences without evading the truth of the ill effects of colonialism initiated and perpetuated by whites. In so doing, Silko, Erdrich, and Hogan become “active agents in history, innovators of new ways, of Indian ways, of being and speaking and authoring in this world created by colonial contact” (Womack 6).

The paradigm for such “new ways. . . of being and speaking and authoring” can be found in Silko’s *Ceremony*, according to Rainwater. She describes this novel as “the first work to address most deliberately the difficulties inherent in cross-cultural interpretation and to foreground, as a part of its actual storyline, an array of interpretive strategies” (11). In attempting to overcome such difficulties, Rainwater states that “Silko has painstakingly made her novel accessible to the non-Indian reader. Many Indian writers . . . have since followed her example of metatextually instructing the reader in Native American history and culture, and in how to interpret the nonwestern components of their narratives” (11). Certainly, Silko has been noted by numerous scholars for her ability “to bridge the gap between Native experiences and non-Indian readers” (Roemer, “Silko’s Arroyos” 228), thus accommodating multiple audiences and making its way into the canon of Twentieth-Century American literature. In fact, it is “the only novel by a Native American author to be ranked in the top twenty-five ‘most significant twentieth-century books of fiction’ (it was eleventh) in the Spring 1999 *Heath Anthology of American Literature Newsletter* survey of several hundred professors” (Lauter qtd. in Roemer, “Silko’s Arroyos” 223-4). Kenneth Roemer offers his own speculations for its widespread acclaim, exploring the reasons for and ramifications of its canonization, and concluding with his hope “that *Ceremony*’s addition to the canon will invite liberating, not terminal readings” (236).

Indeed, in this novel, the paradigm of instructing readers in American Indian (specifically Laguna) mythology, ritual, and storytelling, has invited “liberating, not terminal readings,” opening up a space for a multitude of American Indian writers in the canon.

Silko opens her novel with the story of Ts’its’tsi’nako, Thought-Woman, who is so powerful that “whatever she thinks about appears” (*Ceremony* 1), and whatever she names appears. Moreover, she and her sisters, Nau’ts’ity’i and I’tcts’ity’i, “created the Universe” (1), sharing in this supreme originative power. Silko achieves several intriguing acts here. In initiating the poem with an almost unpronounceable name (at least, in English), she at once draws in Laguna readers and distances others, especially non-Indian ones. Louis Owens notes, in his insightful exploration of Silko’s novel in *Other Destinies*, that such an act can be seen as subversive: “the American Indian writer places the Eurocentric reader on the outside, as ‘other,’ while the Indian reader (a comparatively small audience) is granted, for the first time, a privileged position” (14). However, Silko immediately adds “Thought-Woman” and later “the spider,” thus instructing those in her audience who are unfamiliar with this personage from Laguna tradition. Roemer notes Silko’s “attempts to ‘answer’ the anticipated responses of a readership in between the extraordinary competent Laguna reader and the hopelessly ignorant non-Indian reader” (“Silko’s Arroyos” 231). The rest of the poem, however, builds upon the privileged Indian (specifically Laguna) readers’ knowledge of the power of story: “She [Thought-Woman] is sitting in her room/ thinking of a story now/ I’m telling you the story/ she is thinking” (1). Readers are informed that the story they are about to read is the manifestation of this powerful creator’s thoughts, reinforcing the notion of the power of both Thought-Woman and of story for non-Indian readers.

The following page displays another poem, entitled “Ceremony,” which reiterates the significance of story. Another of Silko’s strategic acts of language can be found in the ambiguous pronouns used here: “I will tell you something about stories/ [he said]/ They aren’t just for entertainment” (2). The bracketed speaker, according to Owens, could be “an anonymous clan elder [who] defines the role and significance of the story we are about to read” (170). Such an elder could certainly be one who kept the stories in “his belly” and transmitted them to his clan, as “all we have to fight off/ illness and death” (Silko, *Ceremony* 2). The speaker/storyteller then addresses his listeners: “You don’t have anything/ if you don’t have the stories” (2), reaffirming (for non-Indian readers unfamiliar with this concept) the power of story. The next stanza, beginning with “Their evil,” at first glance seems to be referring to the last plural noun “stories.” However, as the “story” of this stanza continues, referents to the pronouns “their” and “they” change:

Their evil is mighty  
but it can’t stand up to our stories.  
So they try to destroy the stories  
let the stories be confused or forgotten.  
They would like that  
They would be happy  
Because we would be defenseless then. (2)

All readers may have to struggle momentarily here with the pronoun reference, but for Indian readers, the storyteller’s point will quickly become clear. For non-Indian readers, however, Silko gently guides them into her radical revising of history, not explicitly naming whites as the

destroyers (at least, not yet), but allowing her message to slowly sink in and her readers to perform the needed mental work in order to grasp its potency. Never simplistic, however, Silko's ambiguity allows the possibility for these destroyers to be Indian, too, which will be revealed later in the characters of Emo, Pinky, and Leroy, and even Auntie. Also later, readers will discover a broader context of these destroyers, who are set in motion by witchery, a much more powerful force than that of whites. Thus, in this subtle use of "they," Silko opens up speculation of who these destroyers of stories could be, "inviting liberating, not terminating readings."

The ending of this second prefatory poem provides a transition to the final one: "And in the belly of this story/ the rituals and the ceremony/ are still growing" (2).

Subsequently, Silko changes speakers, beginning the poem with "*What She Said*" (3). Owens suggests that "she" could be either "a clan mother or Thought-Woman reentering the text" (170). In the poem, "she" recommends "a good ceremony" for "[t]he only cure" (Silko, *Ceremony* 3). The fact that a cure is needed hearkens back to the evil mentioned in "his" poem, and to "their" goal of destroying the stories, which would render "defenseless" the people for whom the stories exist. Additionally, the fact that "the rituals and the ceremony are still growing" points to the key motifs in *Ceremony*—those of transition and change. The final page of the prefatory poems contains only one word, "Sunrise" (4), depicting the transition from night to day, a promise of newness, the possibility for change, as well as the beginning of the prose narrative.

The images of these opening poems—the power of story, of words and naming, of evil destroyers and healing ceremonies, of change—become primary figures that will play out in the course of the novel. They serve to open up new frames of reference and radically different

cultural traditions to non-Indian (especially white, Euro-American) readers while privileging Indian readers, especially those aware of Laguna Pueblo and Navajo traditions. The privilege and power of whites seem to be threatened, yet through the medium of poetry and the promise of a story, Silko draws in white readers, who may just be inclined to go along with this “play” of mythic verse. After all, the conflicts of good versus evil and of creation versus destruction, all strands of the web woven by Grandmother Spider, can be viewed as universal; whites have not specifically been implicated as the villains in Silko’s cosmic battles and have even been invited into this “other” realm of knowledge.

Explorations into the power of words occur with each of the two medicine men who attempt to heal Tayo, who, despite his hospital stay, arrives home from World War II still severely psychologically scarred. Each word merits the narrator’s careful instruction to non-Indian readers, especially whites. Tayo seeks Old Betonie, who lives in a hogan overlooking Gallup, New Mexico. The narrator states that this is a town full of whites, who have pushed the Indian inhabitants to the margins of the town, ““on the north side of the railroad tracks, next to the rivers and their dump. Where none of them want to live”” (117). As a microcosm of Manifest Destiny, Gallup and its surroundings exemplify the colonial displacement of Natives by whites, who have taken the best land. However, Betonie explains to Tayo, ““They don’t understand. We know these hills, and we are comfortable here”” (117), laughing at the ignorance of the whites. The word “comfortable” requires elaboration, which the narrator proceeds to provide:

There was something about the way the old man said the word “comfortable.” It had a different meaning—not the comfort of big houses or rich food or even clean



streets, but the comfort of belonging with the land, and the peace of being with these hills. But the special meaning the old man had given to the English word was burned away by the glare of the sun on tin cans and broken, blinding reflections off the mirrors and chrome of the wrecked cars in the dump below.

(117)

This word as used by Betonie connotes a “comfort” radically different from the whites’ concept; however, Tayo sickens at the juxtaposition of this true “comfort” with the debris left in the wake of whites’ items of “comfort.” Betonie, then, tells the story of the hills that the Navajos inhabited until they were moved off by the white people. He adds an ironic twist, however: “But see, this hogan was here first. Built long before the white people ever came. It is that town down there which is out of place” (118). With a skillful interplay of whites and Indians, of environmental exploitation and love of the land, Silko exposes whites as evil and privileges Navajos, all through the power of one word. Of course, this word does not exist alone; rather, it is a strand within a web of story.

Another exploration into the power of words occurs in the speech of old Ku’oosh, who uses “the old dialect full of sentences that were involuted with explanations of their own origins” (34). Having been summoned by Old Grandma to help heal Tayo, Ku’oosh speaks of “the white people’s big war,” and adds that “this world is fragile” (35). Here, Silko instructs “painstakingly,” making “her novel accessible to the non-Indian reader” (Rainwater 11). Silko’s narrator follows Ku’oosh’s words in an attempt to explain the complexity of this word in Tayo’s native language:

The word he chose to express “fragile” was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku’oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said. (*Ceremony* 35-36)

This passage details the power of one word, which crystallizes nuances of meaning and opens up an entire story. The note, however, that “no word exists alone” points to the fragility of the world, a place where all living beings must work together to maintain its balance. Hence, each strand of this fragile web and each word of any story play essential roles in the intricate functioning and continuing of the world. Conversely, when one strand is broken, the balance is disrupted, as it has been “since the white people came” (38). Tayo realizes his fear, that “[i]t took only one person to tear away the delicate strands of the web, spilling the rays of sun into the sand, and the fragile world would be injured” (38). In her use of this one word, Silko subtly portrays whites as destructive and draws them into the intricate web of her story.

The visual structure of the novel, with its interplay of white space, poetry, and prose, serves to reinforce Silko’s web-like plot, which resists linear and chronological movement. Instead of such western conventions, *Ceremony* intertwines, turns back upon itself, reveals mythic, historic, tribal, and individual pasts as they intersect with the present and anticipate the

future. James Ruppert, in *Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction*, notes the following concerning Silko's visual structure:

A study of the special breaks as opposed to chapter breaks might reveal how Silko expresses the flow of one unified field of mediational experience existing in the novel. This field is designed to thwart linear chronological development by allowing events, since they are not locked into chapters, to resonate and return later in the text. The end result is to dismantle Western notions of narrative structure and time so as to allow Native and mediative perception to create meaning. (80)

In crafting her novel this way, Silko implicitly instructs her non-Indian (specifically white) readers to accept such alternative ways of interacting with a text, subtly suggesting that whites, too, need to change just as they have forced change upon others.

In a less subtle critique of whiteness, Silko describes Tayo's experiences upon returning home from World War II (a war waged by whites). He recalls time spent in the white hospital, where he suffers from severe psychological wounds: "[H]e had been white smoke . . . [which] faded into the white world of their bed sheets and walls; it was sucked away by the words of doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scattered smoke" (*Ceremony* 14). Engulfed in a literal and figurative whiteness, Tayo imagines himself as invisible. Interestingly, it is the invisibility of whiteness that gives whites power, a paradox noted by Dyer: "Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen" (45). It is this invisibility, this presumption of being the norm, the default race, that whites use to exert power over (differently "colored") Others. Tayo, in "seeing" himself as

invisible, blends in with the whiteness of his surroundings; however, his invisibility suggests a lack of power, a loss of (Indian, non-white) identity. The white doctors' medicine has "drained memory out of [him]," and he feels "hollow inside" (Silko, *Ceremony* 15). In addition, Tayo hears himself answer the doctor with these words: "'He can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound'" (15). Such use of third person is "the linguistic equivalent of invisibility—a type of self erasure" (Roemer, E-mail, 9 Feb. 2008), coupled with Tayo's loss of his name. Sent home by the white doctors who were unable to cure him, Tayo notices "the cardboard name tag on the handle of the suitcase he carried. . . . It had been a long time since he had thought about having a name" (16). The sacred, generative power of words and names, as first evidenced by Thought-Woman, has been profaned by Tayo's descent into whiteness.

Tayo's psychological wounds are "not separate diseases but rather symptoms of a single disease made insidious precisely by its ability to disguise itself as separate diseases. . . . Tayo's personal illness [is located] within the context of the timeless struggle between life and the forces of witchery that seem to consume life" (Nelson 250-51). These "forces of witchery," which demand separation for their effectiveness, are detailed in a story in poetic form, invented by Silko specifically for this novel (Silko, Lecture). It is Betonie who explains these forces as he attempts to assure Tayo that his guilt is not his fault, that it can be placed upon the witchery that has existed even before the whites. In fact, witchery invented the whites, as told by Betonie: "Long time ago/ in the beginning/ there were no white people in this world/ there was nothing European. . . . This world was already complete/ even without white people./ There was everything/ including witchery" (*Ceremony* 132-33). A poetic account of a dark contest follows;

all of the witches compete in showing off the worst imaginable objects, charms, and powers. The “winner,” a witch with nothing except a story, vividly describes a horrific people, with “*white skin. . . like the belly of a fish,*” a people for whom “*the world is a dead thing,*” a people who “*fear the world . . . [and] destroy what they fear*” (135). At the poem’s end, the other witches call for the teller to “[c]all that story back,” but that is impossible: “*It’s already turned loose./ It’s already coming./ It can’t be called back*” (138). We, as readers, must recall Silko’s opening poem: whatever Thought-Woman thinks or names is created, and all of the text that follows is “the story she is thinking” (1). Thus, this evil witch’s story, along with all of its characters and actions, has already been created and cannot be “called back.” In the utterance of the prophetic poem/story, whites are set loose in the world.

Through the medium of poetry and with the power of story, Silko weaves a hideous history of the whites, from their invention by this most evil witch through the atomic bombs ending World War II. Silko has created a “language game” in which she portrays whites collectively and horrifically, as the worst imaginable creations of witchery. The entire “story” of American colonialism is told in verse, with the pronouns “they” and “them” referring this time unambiguously to whites:

The wind will blow them across the ocean

    thousands of them in giant boats. . . .

They will carry objects which can shoot death

    faster than the eye can see . . . .

Entire villages will be wiped out

    They will slaughter whole tribes. . . .

They will bring terrible diseases  
the people have never known. . . .

They will take this world from ocean to ocean. (136-37)

This history is exposed, yet Silko strategically recounts it as an imaginative tale of a dark contest of witches, rather than a prose account, making it perhaps more palatable, and certainly more eye-opening, for “them” to hear or read. However, colonialism, “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (Loomba 2), is unmistakably linked with the prophecy of “their” takeover of land and genocide by slaughter and disease.

Furthermore, disease brought by (post)colonialism includes more than physical sickness, as in the case of Tayo. Robert M. Nelson describes the symptoms of such disease:

World War II and its dreadful fallout, including such new art forms as nuclear fission and the atomic weapons capable of destroying all life; the polarization of the world’s populations along both ideological and generational lines, . . . and the pervasive feeling of separation and isolation, of anomie or existential alienation, that came increasingly to characterize the American experience in the twentieth century. (250)

These symptoms become broken strands in the fragile web of the novel and necessitate a ceremony for healing, not only of Tayo but of the community and the world. However, Tayo, uncertain of the effectiveness of ceremony, asks Betonie, “I wonder what good Indian ceremonies can do against the sickness which comes from their wars, their bombs, their lies?” (Silko, *Ceremony* 132). Consequences of “their wars, their bombs, their lies” permeate the novel, exposing whites as the cause of such sickness.

Tayo, back from fighting what Ku'oosh calls “the white people’s big war” (35), suffers mental anguish in recalling his role in World War II. He confesses to Ku'oosh that he is not even sure if he killed an enemy since the whites’ warfare is so different from that of the Indians. He confesses to Ku'oosh, “I’m sick, but I never killed any enemy. I never even touched them” (36). However, in the following paragraph he states, “[W]hat if I didn’t know if I killed one?” (36)? The old medicine man does not answer with words, but “made a low humming sound in his throat” (36). The narrator, voicing Tayo’s thoughts, then contrasts the old, Indian ways of killing with the whites’ warfare. In the former, “you couldn’t kill another human being in battle without knowing it, without seeing the result” (36). Tayo, reflecting on the whites’ ways of “killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died” (36), is certain that Ku'oosh would not comprehend this type of atrocity. Even if he saw the “muddy craters of torn earth. . . [and] the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies had evaporated” (37), the old medicine man would not believe that humans could have accomplished such carnage. In their “superior” methods of warfare, whites have manipulated witchery’s tools in supreme acts of separation. Silko exposes atrocities of whites, and in contrasting their methods of killing with those of courageous Indian warriors, strategically portrays whites as cowards. In order to carry out what Dyer terms their “spirit of enterprise” and to interfere with “political and cultural structures of another territory of nation” (Loomba 6), whites must distance themselves from the “others” that they overpower with “white warfare.”

The major weapons for carrying out this white warfare are, of course, bombs, and the ultimate bomb is the atomic one, created by nuclear fission (separation) applied to uranium.

Silko comments on the history of the uranium mines in the Cebolleta land grant, where “they [whites] paid the land-grant association five thousand dollars not to ask questions about the test holes they were drilling” (243). This uranium became the source of the most destructive act of World War II, and “the top secret laboratories where the bomb had been created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the Government took from Cochiti Pueblo” (246). Even the uranium itself can be viewed as a tool of witchery, claims Owens, for “in separating the rock from the earth and in separating elements within the ore,” this natural stone becomes “the most destructive idea man has yet conceived” (189). The atomic bomb becomes the ultimate icon for separating and destroying in *Ceremony*.

In addition to “their wars” and “their bombs” as causes of the sickness, Tayo notes “their lies,” and the lies of whites play crucial roles in the novel. After Tayo’s ceremony, he goes to look for his and Josiah’s spotted cattle, whose hybridity would allow them to survive: “He would take the cattle home again, and they would follow the plans Josiah had made and raise a new breed of cattle that could live in spite of drought and hard weather” (Silko, *Ceremony* 187). Tayo locates the cattle on Floyd Lee’s land, yet hesitates even to think that this white man had stolen them. Wondering about the cause of this hesitation, Tayo realizes that “he had learned the lie by heart—the lie which they had wanted him to learn: only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn’t steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted.” (190-91). “They” are, of course, whites, those who, had invented and inculcated “their lies,” blinded by their attitude of superiority:

The liars had fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believed the lies, they would never be able to see what had been done to them or



what they were doing to each other. . . . If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, then they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery. (191)

Blinded by their own attitude of superiority, of their “destiny” to take over the territory and appropriate the resources of “their” New World, whites are portrayed here as typical colonialists.

However, Silko strategically adds a twist: whites are merely tools of the larger, cosmic witchery, and not so superior to other humans. Indeed, they are no more vital to the workings of the world than any other creations, yet they are oblivious to this possibility:

[T]hey would never know that they were still being manipulated by those who knew how to stir the ingredients together: white thievery and injustice boiling up the anger and hatred that would finally destroy the world: the starving against the fat, the colored against the white. The destroyers had only to set it into motion, and sit back to count the casualties. (191)

Not understanding their collusion with the destroyers, whites continue in the “process of ‘forming a community’ in the new land. . . [which] involved a wide range of practices including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellions” (Loomba 2).

Furthermore, to rationalize their acts to themselves and to others, they must lie. Silko adds that “the lies devoured white hearts, and for more than two hundred years white people had worked to fill their emptiness; they tried to glut the hollowness with patriotic wars and with great technology and the wealth it brought” (*Ceremony* 191). These “patriotic wars” prompted the “great technology” needed to create the atomic bomb, and the land of Silko’s novel is exploited by the colonizers for its rich yields of uranium, another “tool” of the witchery.

Silko's use of mythological witchery, according to Shamoan Zamir, corresponds to anthropological evidence that an increase in the Navajo practice of witchcraft occurs in times of extreme change (402). Betonie notes such a time of change from long ago: "[A]fter the white people came, elements in the world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies" (Silko, *Ceremony* 126). He continues, linking the ceremonies with the witchery: "[T]hings which don't shift and grow are dead things. They are things the witchery people want. Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth. But it has always been necessary, and more than ever now, it is" (126). Certainly, "now" refers to the 1940s when strip-mining for uranium scars the landscape and results in economic exploitation of the Pueblo and Navajo. Zamir cites grim statistics concerning contamination of water supplies and early deaths from radioactivity, all resulting from "the 'dark side of capitalism' and colonization" (399, 403). Setting her novel in this context, Silko implicates whites, their warfare, their technology, and their desire for wealth in such devastation. Zamir does not stop with these points, however. He argues that Silko not only crafts changes in the Navajo and Pueblo ceremonial practices for Betonie to enact, but she also transforms "local narratives into a comprehensive cosmological mapping of evil" (Zamir 401), with her mythic destroyers. Such an expansion of the local to the global is seen by Zamir as a retreat or regression "into an ahistorical nostalgia for mythical transcendence" (406), rather than an effective act of resistance. Nevertheless, he sees the *Ceremony* as "a structure of contradictions that, in its most interesting moments, energizes itself by dramatizing these very contradictions" (406).

Another contradiction, or perhaps complication, can be found in Silko's concession that Indians, too, have colluded with the witchery. Betonie tells Tayo, "Nothing is that simple. . .

you don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians'" (128). In fact, both Tayo's Auntie and his friend Emo serve in the separation of the witchery, and Louis Owens discerns the harm done by these two characters in the novel: "Auntie has sought to separate Tayo from the tribal community and from any positive image of his mother; Emo has not only sought to separate Tayo from the tribal community but has also attempted to divide Tayo against himself by insisting upon Tayo's liminal mixedblood status" (189). Tayo's mother, "lost to the world of white men, alcohol, and, finally, death" (179), would have provided at least some sense of identity for Tayo in the Pueblo matrilineal culture. However, Auntie, ashamed of her sister, "has ostracized Tayo from family and community. . . separating what should be inseparable" (179). In addition, his friend Emo plays a critical role in Tayo's separation. Marked early on as a destroyer, Emo as a child would destroy the ant hills (Silko, *Ceremony* 62), an image that will be recalled during the ceremony performed by Betonie. Also, as a child, Emo hated Tayo, "and the only reason for this hate was that Tayo was part white" (57). Later, as the World War II veterans congregate regularly in the bar on the reservation, Emo relishes "his war souvenirs, the teeth he had knocked out of the corpse of a Japanese soldier" (60-1). As he plays with them in the bar, Tayo is nauseated by Emo's his joy from killing: "Tayo could hear it in his voice when he talked about the killing—how Emo grew from each killing. Emo fed off each man he killed, and the higher the rank of the dead man, the higher it made Emo" (61). Emo is full of hatred, for whites, for Japanese soldiers, for Tayo, performing his own acts of separation. Thus, both Auntie and Emo wield tools of the witchery, adding to the trauma and separation that Tayo experiences in the war by separating him from his past, his heritage, his community. Tayo's condition exemplifies Homi Bhabha's "unhomeliness": "the estranging sense of the relocation

of the home and the world” (9). Certainly the forces of witchery would exult in causing such a sense of displacement, in which “the borders between home and world become confused. . . forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9).

Old Betonie knows well the wiles of witchery, which demand separation for their effectiveness. He also knows that the witchery encompasses more than just whites and Indians, that it ranges “as wide as this world” (124) and that blaming everything on whites is not the answer. He tells Tayo, “That is the trickery of witchcraft” (132) and is exactly what the destroyers want:

They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to *separate* ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates. (132; emphasis added)

Betonie also knows that to overcome this separation, what is needed is “*What She Said*” in the third prefatory poem: “The only cure/ I know/ is a good ceremony,/ that’s what she said” (3). Balance and harmony must be restored. Paula Gunn Allen, in *The Sacred Hoop*, explains that “healing changes and ceremonies emphasize restoration of wholeness, for disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. Beauty is wholeness. Health is wholeness. Goodness is wholeness” (60-61). This sense of wholeness, of harmony, and of interconnectedness is what Tayo needs for his healing to be complete, and only a ceremony can “fuse the individual with his or her fellow, the community of people with that of the other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one” (62).

Through a complex web of story, myth, poetry, memory, and movement, Silko inscribes the ceremony that Tayo performs. Prayer sticks, hoops, sandpainting, and bloodletting are woven into the ritual. Based on the Navajo Red Antway ceremony (Bell 24; 39n), this ritual counters the memory of Emo's destruction of ant hills. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Betonie tells the story of his own birth, and Tayo's rebirth begins; however, his journey to wholeness is not complete. Kenneth Lincoln traces Tayo's journeys, which take him physically in all "the axes of the ceremonial six directions" (247), ending in the center, the kiva. It is there that Tayo knows he "has found power at the core of his being" (Ruppert, *Mediation* 90). This power has enabled him to abstain from killing Emo although he desires revenge for Harley's death; to kill would be to succumb to the witchery that always wants to destroy his good story. Instead, Tayo refuses to be "another victim" (Silko, *Ceremony* 253), for now, he can see beyond. He sees "the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. . . . [he sees] the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time" (246). His healing is complete, at least "for now" (261), and the novel ends as it began, with "Sunrise" (4, 262). Once again, Silko uses a single word to evoke an entire story; in fact, this word reveals an accretion of stories—stories of the people, of Tayo, of the earth and sky. When Tayo sees the spotted cattle "at the moment the sun came over the edge of the horizon" (182), he repeats the words of the "song for the sunrise. . . feeling the instant of the dawn was an event which in a single moment gathered all things together" (182). The words take the form of a prayer, which he ends "with 'sunrise' because he knew the Dawn people began and ended all their words with sunrise" (182).

The image of “sunrise” fuses all that has been separated; furthermore, with the advent of each day, it offers the possibility of “an event which in a single moment” could gather “all things together.” Such an event, however, could only occur if all work together to combat the witchery: “Everyone is included and harmonized in the struggle against the Destroyers who threaten the false sunrise of worldwide nuclear destruction. Defeating the Destroyers will require power from everywhere, even from the whites” (Ruppert, *Mediation* 89). All are responsible in re-spinning the fragile web of the world, the strands of which have been separated by forces of evil. Certainly, whites, with their colonialist plundering of the world, have played a role, and Silko does not underplay this role in her collective portrayals of whites. However, she strategically sets whites in a cosmic context and implicates non-whites along with them as allowing themselves to be manipulated by the witchery. Therefore, all readers can apprehend Silko’s call for cross-cultural healing of this world in danger of destruction, a world for which “[t]he only cure. . . is a good ceremony” (*Ceremony* 3). As Rainwater states, “Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* is not merely *about* a ceremony—it *is* a ceremony. The story is not merely *about* a healing—it is meant to *be* a healing” (157).

Silko, in crafting “the enemy’s language” and in “making it unusually tough and beautiful” (Harjo and Bird 24), initiates a means of cross-cultural healing between Indians and whites. She portrays whites collectively as perpetuators of colonialism whose destructive powers abound, yet she also includes (some) American Indians as tools of the “witchery” designed to separate. In this way, she opens up new frames of reference to white readers, drawing them into her stories, exposing their wrongs, yet offering hope for gathering “all things together.” Silko’s words, used as the epigraph for Ruppert’s Introduction to *Mediation in*

*Contemporary Native American Fiction*, allude to this hope: “an appreciation for the boundless capacity of language which, through storytelling, brings us together, despite great distances between cultures, despite great distances in time” (vii). Similarly, Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe), in *Tracks*, “reinvents the enemy’s language” and employs storytelling techniques to bring together radically different cultures and times. Also, in revealing non-mainstream historical accounts, Erdrich exposes white readers to their collective roles in physical and cultural genocide of the Native inhabitants. In addition, like Silko, Erdrich uses language strategically to portray whites collectively without alienating them yet disrupting their ingrained attitudes of privilege and superiority.

Although not overtly or harshly detailing historical events concerning Indian/white relations, Erdrich sets *Tracks* contextually in history. She includes stories of disease, starvation, governmental takeover of land, and the lumber industry’s exploitation of Ojibwe (or Anishinabe) reservation forests. Moreover, by setting the beginning of the novel in 1912, she strategically alludes to the General Allotment or Dawes Act of 1887. Joy Porter notes that according to this momentous Act, “[t]he land was to be held in trust by the Secretary of the Interior for twenty-five years until it became fully the Indian’s property and the Indian subject to all state and federal laws” (53). Thus, 1912 marks the year in which land titles would be renegotiated, and, as seen in *Tracks*, the consequences generally proved devastating not only to these particular Ojibwe owners, but to many Indians. Porter adds that rather than providing Indians with (“legal,” government-sanctioned) ownership of their land, “the Act made a great many Indians landless and assimilated around two-thirds of the Indian landbase into non-Indian ownership”

(53). As one of the numerous “legacies of colonialism,” this piece of history is elaborated in *Tracks*, and Erdrich exposes the deleterious effects on individuals in this tribe of Ojibwe.

Also similar to Silko, Erdrich transforms the oral tradition into written form, but *Tracks* is told by two first-person narrators, Nanapush and Pauline Puyat. As master storyteller, elder of the tribe, and trickster figure, Nanapush tells the story of the tribe and of Fleur Pillager directly to Lulu, Fleur’s daughter, but also to multiple audiences. In speaking through him, Erdrich does not ingratiate white audiences by mollifying her portrayals of whites; however, she does use humor to temper Nanapush’s critiques. Erdrich’s other narrator, Pauline, an Indian-turned-white (but not quite), can be seen as a caricature of whiteness, and it is through her that whiteness at its worst is exposed. Both narrators offer readers instruction in their perceptions of whites and of their relations with Indians, although the latter is privileged this time. The result is what Louis Owens terms “a richly hybridized dialogue,” and one of its effects “is subversive: the American Indian writer places the Eurocentric reader on the outside, as ‘other,’ while the Indian reader (a comparatively small audience) is granted, for the first time, a privileged position” (14).

Such “hybridized dialogue” is evident even in the chapter titles of *Tracks*, as noted by Nancy Peterson. For example, the title “Chapter One” is followed by “Winter 1912/Manitou-geezishons/ Little Spirit Sun,” then “Nanapush” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 1). Peterson explains: “The need to know history as it is constructed both orally and textually is indicated by the contextual phrases that begin each chapter: first a date, including the designation of season(s) and year(s), then a phrase in Anishinabe followed by an English translation” (985-86). In this way, Erdrich both instructs white readers and privileges Indian (Ojibwe, Anishinabe) ones while employing written language to introduce and “tell” a story. Through her “hybrid narrative,” she offers all



readers “an alternative perspective in which colonizers may see images of themselves through the eyes of the colonized” (Horne 191).

From the opening of the novel, we see consequences of whites’ collective intrusions into the Indians’ world, or “legacies of colonialism.” From disease, battles, treaty-signings for land takeover, to the decimation of the tribe and the end of the buffalo, Nanapush opens his story dramatically. Beginning with the plural “we,” as his “tribe unraveled like a coarse rope, frayed at either end as the old and new among us were taken” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 2), Nanapush then shifts to first-person singular. Taking over the narrative as one of the few survivors, he claims: “I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. . . . I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager” (2). From the outset, the readers, as well as the listener, Lulu, can detect the preeminence of not only the master storyteller, but also of Fleur Pillager. Indeed, the power of the Pillagers is known throughout the Anishnabe. Edgar Pukwan, a tribal policeman, certainly fears this power, as he and Nanapush venture to the Pillagers’ cabin, where they find all but Fleur dead. Pukwan “did not want to enter, fearing the unburied Pillager spirits might seize him by the throat and turn him windigo” (3). The two men leave the four dead Pillagers frozen in their cabin, which is felt by some of the tribe to have been a monumental mistake, as noted by Nanapush:

There are some who say Pukwan and I should have done right and buried the Pillagers first thing. They say the unrest and curse of trouble that struck our people in the years that followed was the doing of dissatisfied spirits. I know what’s fact, and have never been afraid of talking. Our trouble came from living, from liquor and the dollar bill. We stumbled toward the government bait, never

looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched from under us at every step. (4)

Nanapush fully understands both the power of the Pillagers and that of the intruding whites. As a trickster, Nanapush knows how to mediate between two worlds; he resists binaries, moving fluidly within the space between, cognizant of the strengths and frailties of all. His mediation is an important part of adaptation for survival, as is his manipulation of “the enemy’s language.”

Having been sent to the white Jesuit school, Nanapush knows the language of the powerful whites and also knows how to use it for the benefit of his people. He refuses to buy into the whites’ religion, yet becomes the best friend of Father Damien. Adept at mediation and adaptation, he can relate to Indians and whites and can discern some of the sources of their conflicts. First, his people’s “trouble came from living.” The fact that they were there, “living” in the land demanded by the whites, perhaps prompted the enmity but could hardly be blamed on the Indians. Nor could they be blamed for the whites’ introducing them to “liquor and the dollar bill.” However, the responses to these changes wrought by whites Nanapush lays on his own people; they made their own choices, unmindful of the consequences, blindly playing into the hands of the whites. As well, Nanapush reverts to the communal “we/us,” taking responsibility himself in the stumbling “toward the government bait, never looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched from under us at every step” (4). He realistically assesses history and his role in it, rather than laying blame on the other side and whining over the wrongs inflicted on his people. In this way, he echoes old Betonie in *Ceremony*, who claims that blaming everything on the whites is not the answer; moreover, like Tayo, Nanapush takes responsibility for the state of his tribe in this (post)colonialist land.

The other narrator in *Tracks*, Pauline Puyat, tells remarkably different stories, portrays whites and Christianity in her own aberrant way, and addresses a different audience than that of Nanapush. His audience includes first, Lulu, whom he directly addresses and for whom his entire tale is told; in addition, his implied audience includes Erdrich's readers, or, to use Rainwater's designation, "reader[s]-as-listener[s]" (20). Pauline, on the other hand, "addresses no one in particular and thus implicitly addresses a reader, not a listener" (Peterson 989). As noted by Roemer, "[w]hen Pauline does tell stories to a particular audience, that audience is often vulnerable and her motives are typically harmful. . . . But most of her narrative seems devoid of audience, and her motives are profoundly muddled" ("They Talk" 8). If Pauline is viewed as a caricature of whites, perhaps Erdrich's subversive strategy is to displace whites from their authoritative, superior stance of talking and being listened to by an audience. The ambiguity of audience here reinforces Erdrich's insistence on opening up alternatives. Her "storytelling strategy creates distance from certainty and asserts that there is never 'one true telling' of a story, but only differing versions" (Clarke 38).

Pauline's narrative is tainted by her own inability to see anyone else's goodness except her own. At an early age, Pauline decides to choose whiteness as the way to gain glory: "[E]ven as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us. I would not speak our language" (Erdrich, *Tracks* 14). Seeing herself through the colonizers' eyes and renouncing her own people and language, Pauline flees to Argus. In this white town, she can live out her desire to be like her mother, "who showed her half-white" and her "grandfather, pure Canadian" (14). Buying into the myths of white superiority and (post)colonial privilege, Pauline determines to place herself on a pedestal of whiteness. In doing

so, she reinforces Ruth Frankenberg's claim "that whiteness is always constructed, always in the process of being made and unmade. Indeed, its characterization as unmarked marker is in itself an 'ideological' effect that seeks to cover the tracks of its constructedness, specificity, and localness, even as they appear" (16). However, here, as Pauline deliberately constructs her own whiteness, Erdrich blatantly exposes "the tracks of its constructedness," converting Pauline into a caricature.

In Argus, Pauline experiences another aspect of whiteness, that of invisibility, as explained by Dyer: "Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen" (45). Pauline states, "I was invisible to most customers . . . . I blended into the stained brown walls" (Erdrich, *Tracks* 15-16). It is Pauline's "brownness," her skin pigmentation, which allows her to be invisible against "the stained brown walls." She craftily uses her power of "being unseen": "From this, I took what advantage I could find. Because I could fade into a corner or squeeze beneath a shelf I knew everything: how much cash there was in the till, what the men joked about when no one was around, and what they did to Fleur" (16). Pauline's literal, power-giving invisibility is the opposite of Tayo's. Although both share similar skin pigmentation and claim to be invisible, Tayo's invisibility is figurative. Even when surrounded by the whiteness of the hospital, Tayo's invisibility permeates his whole being and renders him powerless. Perhaps because he does not attempt to "take on" whiteness, as does Pauline, he is excluded from its power-giving invisibility.

Armed with the power of privileged information concerning Fleur, Pauline returns to the reservation full of stories. Of course, she uses her power for her own aggrandizement, to the

detriment of Fleur. Even though she claims that “[p]ower travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth” (31), Pauline wrests the power of knowledge of Fleur’s story and claims that she alone holds the key to this knowledge. Placing herself in the center of this closing part of the chapter, Pauline gives us the tribal gossip concerning Fleur, her powers, her men, and her daughter Lulu, whose father remains undisclosed. Pauline even draws upon the power of story, of its changeability and possibilities: “It comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning. They get the middle wrong too. They only know they don’t know anything” (31). “They” do not know the story, but Pauline does. She may not have been born into the pure blood of power as Fleur has, but she attempts to appropriate it with her “inside” knowledge of Fleur’s full story, just as she tries to appropriate “white” power. Her attempts, however, serve to highlight Erdrich’s caricature of whites, especially Christian (Catholic) whites.

Although not yet converted to Christianity, Pauline begins her next narrative with her admission of guilt that plagues her dreams, guilt from both “sins of omission” and “sins of commission” (Roemer, “They Talk” 9). She sees herself as merely watching and doing nothing, a “witness when the men slapped Fleur’s mouth, beat her, entered and rode her” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 66). Also, she sees herself dropping the beam that locked the men in the meat freezer in Argus. Yet, once she attends to the dying Mary Pepewas, Pauline envisions herself as the one who gave death the power, who cut “the rope [that] was frayed” (68), ending Mary’s life. Afterwards, in a vision, Pauline sees herself as rising “into the air” and seeing all below as “stupid and small” (68) in relation to herself. This vision frees her from her guilt, and increases her pride. She sees herself as “different. . . devious and holy, dangerously meek and mild” (69), as she becomes known as the seemingly selfless attendant of the dying. However, it is not for others, but for

herself that she thankfully encounters death: “I . . . waited for the moment that brought *me* peace” (69; emphasis added). Any power that Pauline claims she has is always for herself, whether for peace from a false forgiveness of her own sins or for her self-aggrandizement. Pharisaical pride and hypocrisy mark Pauline, Erdrich’s caricature of (white) Christians.

The moment of Pauline’s conversion is not recounted, but certain events, beginning with her vision, contribute to it. Certainly a turning point occurs when she witnesses the statue of the Virgin Mary weep real tears that freeze to “hard drops” and resemble “pebbles of frozen quartz” (94-5). No one else sees this private “miracle,” and the only evidence, those frozen tears, melt in Pauline’s pocket. However, Pauline’s memory of this event sharpens “on the knowledge,” and she broods upon it “[f]or many months afterward” (95). By the beginning of her next narrated chapter, Pauline states, “I had already betrothed myself to God” (131), although by that time, she has also become pregnant with Napoleon Morrissey’s child. Bernadette Morrissey, who promises to take the child, names her Marie, “for the Virgin,” yet Pauline knows better: “Satan was the one who had pinned me with his horns” (133).

Renouncing this child as she does her own Indianness, Pauline enters the convent. Her miraculous visions and their corresponding commands continue, but now they are given to her from Christ, who sits “in the moonlight on the stove” (137). He not only forgives her of her abandoned daughter, but he tells her she is an orphan and, thus, “not one speck of Indian but wholly white” (137). With her “white power,” now sanctioned by Christ Himself, she is told to go out among the Indians, to “be still, and listen” (137). Pauline, however, “is at best a selective listener. She listens intensely to the nuns’ ‘idle talk’ . . . [but] she resists listening to Nanapush’s gentle and not so gentle hints about the absurd and dangerous nature of her acts of penance”

(Roemer, "They Talk" 8). She also listens "selectively to her Christ-on-the-stove vision" (11), and devises her own extraordinary ways of finding "out the habits and hiding places of His enemy" (Erdrich, *Tracks* 137). She does, however, listen carefully for "the next instruction by His lips" (139) concerning her own enemy, Fleur Pillager.

Well acquainted with the stories of Fleur and "the gold-eyed creature in the lake" (139), Pauline recognizes this enemy's power: "She was the one who closed the door or swung it open. Between the people and the gold-eyed creature in the lake, the spirit which they said was neither good nor bad but simply had an appetite, Fleur was the hinge" (139). Pauline knows that Fleur, as the "hinge," has the power to close this door or open it. She can travel through the door from one world to the next—from the natural to the supernatural, from life to death. However, Pauline also recognizes that Christ has this power:

It was like that with Him too, Our Lord, who had obviously made the whites more shrewd, as they grew in number, all around, some even owning automobiles, while the Indians receded and coughed to death and drank. It was clear that Indians were not protected by the thing in the lake or by the other Manitous who lived in trees, the bush, or spirits of animals that were hunted so scarce they became discouraged and did not mate. (137)

Pauline, thus, views Christ also as a hinge between not only between heaven and earth but also between whites and Indians. Reinforcing her long-held belief in the superiority of whites and their "position of power" (Dyer 2), she claims that Christ had made them "more shrewd" since "they grew in number . . . while the Indians receded and coughed to death and drank." Now, something must be done to help "them," as Pauline calls the Indians: "There would have to

come a turning, a gathering, another door. And it would be Pauline, who opened it, same as she closed the Argus lockers. Not Fleur Pillager” (139). Pauline becomes the self-proclaimed savior of the Indians, a new “hinge” with power equaling not only that of Fleur Pillager, but also that of Christ.

As such, Pauline must root out the “devil in the land, a shadow in the water” (137), but in doing so, she reveals her selective listening. She “hears” the words “devil” and “a shadow in the water,” assuming “that this devil *is* the Lake Creature and that she is fulfilling her mission by going out on the lake to confront this devil and destroy it” (Roemer, “They Talk” 11; emphasis added). Near the end of the novel, in carrying out this “mission,” Pauline’s self-ascribed power becomes not only false but also farcical. Roemer describes this “grand scene” vividly: “In Nanapush’s leaky old boat she ventures out on to Lake Machimanito. Practically the entire cast of *Tracks* assembles on the shore. (The parallels to Christ preaching to the crowds from a boat are obvious.)” (11). Rebuffing all attempts to save her as the boat almost sinks, Pauline vows “to suffer in the desert forty days, forty nights. . . . to wait for . . . [her] tempter. . . . to transfix him with the cross” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 200). However, her brazen attempt to destroy Satan, in the form of the lake man, results in her murdering Napoleon Morrissey with a rosary. For this act, however, she feels no guilt: “How could I have known what body the devil would assume?” (203). After such a self-centered flourish of power, she enters the convent, recognized as worthy to take her vows. Her entrée into the white world of the convent is complete as she commits an act that would be scorned by many Indians—she changes her own name to a name “rewarded” by chance. Her new name, determined by her drawing a “scrap of paper” from Mother Superior’s hand, is Leopolda. She thus “leave[s] Pauline behind” (205).



To complete this caricature of whiteness, Erdrich bestows the name Leopolda to Pauline, an ironic feat. Dee Horne notes this “allusion to King Leopold II (1835-1909) of Belgium, who organized ‘development’ in central Africa” (195). The white colonialist king and the almost-but-not-quite white (post)colonialist nun participate in their own “civilizing missions” in Erdrich’s strategic characterization of Pauline. Perhaps such a one-dimensional “read” of Pauline Puyat’s character does not, however, do justice to Erdrich, known for the “complexity of her major characters” (Roemer, “They Talk” 13). Roemer’s analysis of Pauline both provokes sympathy and reinforces “legacies of colonialism.” He contends that “Pauline’s selective listening skills . . . reflect the internalization of, not only recent events in her adolescent years in Argus, but also generations of powerful forces dramatically impacting the lives of Ojibwe and many other tribes” (14). Viewed through this lens, Sister Leopolda becomes not a caricature but a tragic consequence of whiteness. Although these perspectives may seem incongruous, the messages of whiteness embodied in this complex character are similar; whites are portrayed collectively as self-exalting, hypocritical, and power-hungry, who listen selectively and act condescendingly toward those who need their “civilizing.”

Through the character of Nanapush and his stories, Erdrich portrays whites as intruding colonialists, bent on abolishing the tribe’s way of life. However, instead of assisting in whites’ “mission” as does Pauline, Nanapush resists; as Dee Horne claims, “Telling stories is, as Nanapush notes, a way to resist cultural genocide” (192). Furthermore, this master storyteller not only counters whites’ killing the culture of his tribe; he also counters death himself. He recalls a time when “[d]uring the year of sickness,” he saved himself from death: “I fainted, lost breath, so that I could hardly keep moving my lips. But I did continue and recovered. I got well

by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 46). He also tells Lulu of the time that she almost froze to death, trekking through the snow to ask for help with Fleur’s childbirth. Nanapush knows the power of his “cure songs” and of words, and tells Lulu how he saved her that night, talking on and on “until you entered the swell and ebb and did not sink but were sustained” (167). As trickster, he can also be a “hinge,” but he uses his power for healing and survival, rather than for pride.

Also acting as trickster, Nanapush uses his cunning to outsmart whites in their obsession with paperwork. After the loss of his and Fleur’s land and the invasion of their woods by the Turcot lumber company, he realizes that he must try “to grasp this new way of wielding influence, this method of leading others with a pen and paper” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 209). He runs for and wins the position of tribal chairman, becoming “a bureaucrat,” which was the only way he could possibly “reach through the loophole and draw you [Lulu] home” (225). Interestingly, as Peterson notes, it is by means of the (white) government’s insistence on written records that Nanapush is able to obtain Lulu’s release from boarding school: “Ironically, Lulu’s birth certificate—recognized as an authentic document by white authorities—is a lie, for Nanapush is not her biological father” (990). Thus, it is through his skillful manipulation of “the enemy’s language,” or, in this case, the enemy’s requirement for written records, that he rescues Lulu from the whites’ enforced education of the Indians.

Also acting out his trickster role, Nanapush bemoans the fact that his tribe is no longer anything but a “tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees. A tribe of chicken-scratch that can be scattered by a wind” (225). Rainwater notes, however, that “[t]hough these metaphors at first appear merely self-

deprecating, Nanapush the trickster must certainly be aware of their double-coded message for the alert reader who knows that ‘pressed trees,’ or paper, are what books are made of” (25). Books, printed and disseminated to ever-growing audiences of American Indian literature, become a means of countering colonialism. Even if a tribe’s traditions are “reduced to papers made of cherished trees stripped from lost lands” (26), ironically, this “paperwork” ensures their continued survival (26). As trickster-narrator and master of paperwork, Nanapush can adapt and join those “formerly conquered [who] write—as they fight—back” (Krupat, *Voice* 3-4).

Another way of “fighting back” against the encroachment of whites is revealed through Fleur Pillager’s supreme act of resistance. Unknown even to Nanapush, Fleur saws off her oak trees at the base before the Turcot Lumber Company men arrive on her land. Moreover, as Nanapush recounts, it appears that Fleur directs the wind: “With one thunderstroke the trees surrounding Fleur’s cabin cracked off and fell away from us in a circle, pinning beneath their branches the roaring men” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 223). By this time in the novel, readers, whether white or not, will likely cheer silently as Fleur takes into her own hands the loss of her land with its valuable trees. She “steals” from the white land thieves their glee at striking the first blows that will down the coveted oaks for their lumber. Through Nanapush’s stories and Pauline’s skewed perspectives of this powerful character, readers are drawn to “side” with Fleur, and whites, represented by the lumber company, are viewed as the villains who get what they deserve. In this “subversive narrative,” Erdrich, once again, “offers readers an alternative perspective in which colonizers may see images of themselves through the eyes of the colonized” (Horne 191). This particular, humorous image of the lumber-loving whites lying pinned and

“mute in the huge embrace of the oaks” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 224) prompts white readers to see this satirical twist and to laugh at these “images of themselves.”

As Erdrich strategically portrays whites in a blend of storytelling and history, told and viewed from varying perspectives, she succeeds in exposing evils of colonialism without alienating her white readers. As noted by Roemer, Erdrich “inevitably humanizes and complicates her good and bad characters” (“They Talk” 13); thus, both whites and Indians may be ridiculed and/or applauded, as they attempt the arduous task of cohabiting the same country. *Tracks* becomes a “hinge” in itself, allowing readers access to “another door” (139), a door that opens up alternative ways of viewing history. Wielding the power of language, Erdrich allows readers passage into a “textual frontier” (Krupat, *Native* 4) where knowledge and experience can be shared between Indians and whites. Her innovative use of two antithetical narrators not only provides different perspectives of history/stories, but also reveals insights into the complex ramifications of white/Indian interrelationships, all tempered with humor.

As Erdrich and Silko both expose and explore some of these ramifications, so does Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) in her 1990 novel *Mean Spirit*. In all three novels, one of the “legacies of colonialism” in the form of “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (Loomba 2) plays a significant role. As discussed previously, Silko uses uranium in *Ceremony* as an icon of separation, the greatest tool of witchery. In *Tracks*, Erdrich’s Ojibwe suffer not only from loss of land but also loss of the forests destroyed to satisfy the whites’ insatiable desire for building. Similarly, Hogan’s novel focuses on consequences of whites’ greed for another natural resource, but here it is that of oil belonging to the Osages in Oklahoma. As evident throughout the history of the Federal government and the Indians, land treaties have been made

and broken again and again. Even when land was “awarded” to specific tribes, whenever natural resources on that land were deemed desirable, the government has cheated tribes of their land and taken it back, enabling continuing colonizers to carry out “Manifest Destiny,” America’s brand of colonialism.

With colonialism came capitalism, a logical progression explained by Loomba: “[C]olonialism, . . . the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods, . . . produced the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry” (2, 4). Certainly, the idea of capitalism and free enterprise was adopted by settlers in America, and with it came materialism. Dyer, attributing the notion of “enterprise” to whites, includes “wealth creation” with this “aspect of both spirit itself. . . and of its effect” (31). Therefore, the greed of materialistic whites, a legacy of colonialism, becomes a driving force of their takeover of land from the Native inhabitants. In American Indian literature, we see repeatedly the causes and effects of the displacement of tribes, and in *Mean Spirit*, the motif of displacement of the Osages is foregrounded.

Described as “insolent and very proud. . . courageous, aggressive and vengeful” (Mathews 346-47), the Osages have battled “surrounding tribes from earliest history and were held in terror by many” (345). With the encroaching whites, this battling continued, as could be expected. After numerous treaties and displacements, near the end of the nineteenth century, the Osages were relegated to Indian Territory in Oklahoma, where they “bought a reservation from the Cherokees” (359). Preparing “to open Indian Territory to white settlement and create a new state. . . during the 1890s. . . Congress insisted that all communally held Indian reservations be allotted and that tribal governments be abolished” (Wilson 450). However, the Osages, still

proud and courageous, resisted such pressure. As a result, rather than the 160-acre individual allotments, “the Osages received allotments of over five hundred acres each” (450) and maintained the mineral rights to their land. This benefit, however, put the Osages in peril. Although by “the 1920s, the Osages “because widely heralded as ‘the richest group of people in the world,’ . . . Exploiters of all kinds descended upon the Osages to separate them from their money” (450). In Hogan’s *Mean Spirit*, set in 1922, such exploiters infiltrate the Osage town of Talbert, bent on cheating the owners of oil-rich land, even to the extent of murder.

In exposing whites as the greedy exploiters of Osage land, Hogan strategically employs the motif of movement. From the first page of the novel, we discover that some of this band of Osages have “moved their beds outdoors in hopes a chance breeze would pass over and provide relief from the hot nights” (3). This microcosmic movement enlarges to envelop the Hill Indians, who have moved away from the town to the outlying bluffs to reinstate a simpler life than that created by whites’ infringement. Other characters move fluidly from the town to its margins, to the hills, and back, as whites and Indians also “move” from one identity to the other. In addition, movement may be mapped from the oil beneath the earth, to the scarred surface, to the caves, to the hills, and even to the “fiery stars that fell to earth, and when they landed, everything burned” (39). As noted in Catherine Rainwater’s work, *Dreams of Fiery Stars: The Transformations of Native American Fiction*, this (macro)cosmic movement, first recounted in a dream, culminates the novel’s movement and “terminates more than five hundred years of Euro-American domination” (ix). Years of forced movement by whites result in freedom of movement by these Osages, and Hogan’s counter-colonialist message becomes clear.

In addition to movement as a form of resistance, Hogan, like Silko and Erdrich, blends history and story. In an interview with Carol Miller, Hogan describes her own process of fusing history and story. With a legacy of family and tribal history, based mainly in Oklahoma, Hogan incorporates her Chickasaw background and her knowledge of the Osages. She notes that “the land swindles. . . [and the] stories of oil. . . were really a part of my life” (2). The specific details in her novel concerning Stace Red Hawk and his investigation into the murders are historically based, which, when woven into her story, become the embodiment of N. Scott Momaday’s description of story in “Man Made of Words”: “Do you see what happens when imagination is superimposed upon the historical event? It becomes a story. The whole piece becomes more invested with meaning” (89). Thus, both the stories and the historical facts become “invested with meaning” when fused in *Mean Spirit* because, as Hogan notes, “there was a history to our life that needed to be saved, a history not in books or films” (qtd. in Miller 5). Nancy Peterson’s assertion that “[w]riters like Erdrich. . . must find a new way of making history” (984) can be effectively applied to Hogan’s novel, in which she reinscribes history through story, exposing the destructiveness of whites.

Early in the novel, readers learn that Michael Horse, “the last person in Indian Territory to live in a tepee” (Hogan 32), is in the process of (re)inscribing history, adapting the oral tradition into written records. He keeps a diary of events detailing collective, tribal, and personal histories/stories, as well as his own prophecies. Horse’s diary parallels the adaptation required of American Indian writers, as noted by Rainwater: “The very act of writing narrative imposes constraints on these authors that are foreign to Native American literary expression. Thus their works amount to a break with and a transformation of the American Indian storytelling tradition”

(*Dreams* xiii). Hogan puts an interesting twist to this transformation; for most of the novel, Horse's written record is referred to orally, rather than in writing, as "references to Michael's book—rather than passages from it—signify its existence" (46). The major characters all know of the diary, even though they do not know its specific contents until near the end of the narrative. Rainwater notes that "Hogan reminds us that the stories (and histories) of nondominant groups are always threatened by co-optation" (46). Thus, as long as the written words are not revealed, they may not be co-opted or incorporated "into the dominant discourse" (46). Interestingly, the written words are never revealed; Horse reads his book aloud, retaining control of his story/history. Hogan strategically suggests that the inscription of tribal history remains a work in progress, "the fluid, indeterminate story of a yet undisclosed future" (46). Rainwater terms Horse's diary the "inner narrative" and comments on Hogan's use of it in the novel:

In Hogan's layered novel, an outer narrative recounting episodes in Osage history and the daily lives of a variety of characters envelops an in-progress, prophetic, inner narrative. . . . The "Indian" story implied in the inner narrative juxtaposes the outer narrative, a more Eurocentrically constructed story of the Osage past. (45)

With such layering of the novel, Hogan's narrative moves fluidly among historical, Eurocentric accounts of Indian/white relations, the actions of the characters, and the inner, spiritual realm of dreams, visions, and prophecies. When the inner narrative is finally disclosed, the tribe's survival is assured by Horse, both tangibly (or textually) through his written records, and intangibly (or symbolically) through his constant care in tending the tribal fire.



As Hogan weaves history throughout the novel, she exposes actions of whites, who, collectively and individually, swindle Osages out of their land and oil. The third-person omniscient narrator, referring to the Dawes (Allotment) Act of 1887, states that the original 160-acre allotments “seemed generous at first glance so only a very few people realized how much they were being tricked” (8). The Osages did not realize that the Act freed up much more land than was available before for white settlers, or “that black undercurrents of oil moved beneath that earth’s surface” (8). Thus, from the opening of the novel, whites are portrayed as land swindlers and invaders of the town of Watona, Oklahoma, which is also called Talbert. The double-named town evokes Silko’s statement in *Ceremony*, that “all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name” (68). The colonialists superimposed their own names for places in the land they conquered, but in *Mean Spirit*, Hogan subverts this act. Readers “see,” along with Michael Horse as he drives to town, the sign: “Talbert, Oklahoma, was covered with red paint, and WATONA was written over it in large black letters. For the Indians it was still the gathering ground, and not some banker’s hilly red stone town” (55). The “red” name superimposed over the “white” reveals an act of resistance, a “reinvention of the enemy’s language.”

In another strategic use of history, Hogan incorporates a flashback of the original displacements of the Five Civilized Tribes (including the Chickasaws) from the South into Oklahoma. Here, she reminds readers that Indians have a tragic history of movement, instigated by whites. Yet, it is from a remnant of this history that Belle Graycloud appropriates the power needed to help the incarcerated Benoit. After having prayed “for the spirit world to show her a

way through the hard times that were falling again on the Indian people” (80), Belle dreams of her grandmother in a “tear” dress:

Tear dresses were what the women wore during the removal of the Chickasaws from their Mississippi homeland. As they journeyed west, to Oklahoma, the women had been permitted to carry nothing sharp, no knives or scissors, not even their tongues; nothing with the potential for being a weapon against the American army that herded the uprooted, torn-away people from their beautiful, rich woodlands in the south. Because they had no scissors or knives, cloth was torn by their blunt teeth and ripped apart by their hands. . . [then] fashioned into dresses. (81)

The play on words of “tears” from weeping, “tears” from ripping of fabric, and the “Trail of Tears” conveys a reminder of the “American army that herded the uprooted torn-away people” from their homeland and accompanying emotions of the women. The “tear” dress becomes a fabric woven of threads of stories—of Hogan’s family, of Belle’s family, and of the history of tribes that were displaced—and symbolizes tradition, power, and resistance to whites. Upon awakening, Belle unearths her own blue tear dress, along with her daughter Lettie’s Osage regalia, and determines that she and her daughter will don these clothes to invoke the power needed to deal with the white authorities as they visit Benoit in jail. She invokes the power of this remnant of history, adapting it to meet her own needs in this “world turned upside down” (371).

The motif of movement extends also to the forced displacement of some of the novel’s characters from their homes to Indian boarding schools, suffering from this harsh form of

indoctrination by whites. Not only were Indian children of almost every tribe moved away from their homes, a traumatic experience in itself, but they were forbidden to speak their own languages and forced to learn English immediately. Students were coerced, often in the form of corporal punishment, to forsake their own culture for that of the whites, including not only language but also religion, history, and scientific knowledge. Thus, the pan-Indian traditions and culture were, in effect, delegitimized. Hogan expresses her concern for the devastating effects of this white, “civilizing machine” (Zitkala-Ša 66) on American Indians today in Laura Coltelli’s *Winged Words*:

If you look at the [boarding school] educational system, and how for tribal people, to be taken away from home as a young child; to have the whole family system and the tribal system broken up by children being taken away from families—you can imagine the consequences it still has on families now. (81)

Such consequences become the focus of Hogan’s use of the “Boarding-School Repertoire,” a term used by Amelia Katanski in her 2005 work, *Learning to Write “Indian.”*

In her insightful examination of Indian boarding school history, Katanski reveals the pervasive effects of this system. Although negative effects prevail in American Indian literature, Katanski determines that some of the consequences of this method of forced acculturation have proven to be positive. In uniting children of multiple tribes with a common language, English, the boarding school system has provided American Indian writers with a pan-tribal means of reclaiming “power for the purposes of rhetorical self-determination and literary self-education” (216). These writers draw from “the body of writing that has come out of the Indian boarding-school experience” (216), to create their own subversive literary texts. As Loomba notes,

“literature is also an important means of appropriating, inverting or challenging dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies” (70-1). Thus, by exposing the Indian boarding school system while employing English, American Indian writers “reinvent the enemy’s language” and create their own forms of resistance to colonialism.

In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan’s characters, notably Cal Severance and Ben Graycloud, move to and from boarding school, returning with unresolved conflicts and incurable wounds. Cal, years after his return from boarding school, remembers his time at Carlisle: “[He] was proud that he had the distinction of surviving Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. . . . Carlisle had been a school well-known for its Indian football team as well as for athlete Jim Thorpe” (151). Many readers, though perhaps unaware of Carlisle, will have heard of Jim Thorpe, of Olympic fame. By including this positive association with Carlisle Indian School, part of the outer narrative layer, Hogan then subverts readers’ expectations. Severance recalls trying to escape, then being “hung by his thumb as punishment for ‘insolence.’ The result was that his skin and nerve had torn away from the bone” (151). This character retains a lasting physical and visible reminder of whites’ brutality, while another character, Ben Graycloud, suffers from inner wounds. Returning to Watona from his escape from boarding school, Ben begins searching for Cal and starts “up toward the hills” (253). However, he does not make it but falls asleep in a gully. In a drunken dream, he sees “the stone walls of Haskell where he had gone crazy and removed his clothing and run away naked” (253). Immediately after recounting this dream, the narrator “pans” to Ben’s parents, who dance continuously, then to the Hill People, whose “bodies moved easily” (254). In addition, the runners are described, those who “greeted the day’s sun, breathed earth’s rich odor inside themselves. . . and who ran so fluidly across the land” (254). In stark contrast,

Ben Graycloud is paralyzed; his movement is arrested by the reminder of his traumatic boarding school experience.

In addition to portraying whites as instigators of Indian boarding school, Hogan exposes them as corrupt government officials. Her character Stace Red Hawk, a Lakota, becomes a vehicle of resistance as he attempts to help his people by working within the dominant culture. When he first tells his mother of his decision to take the job of a tribal policeman, she warns him: “The people will never trust you if you are with the police” (267). She recounts the story of Crazy Horse, tricked by Lakota policemen, who “persuaded him to go speak with the men who represented the government of the United States, but it was a trap and once there Crazy Horse was held by his own friend, little Big Man, so that the government officers could kill him” (267). Hogan’s narrator then expounds upon this slice of history: “When he was dead, Crazy Horse had been cut in half to fit in a box. As if he’d not been divided enough in life. His parents took him away. No one else followed. They grieved too deeply to say good-bye to his severed body. The Lakota still mourned for that good, strong man who had loved and looked after his people” (267-68). In exposing the atrocity of this particular group of white government officials, Hogan strategically, yet certainly not at all subtly, instructs readers versed only in mainstream history.

Regardless of his mother’s warning, Red Hawk chooses to move to Washington, D. C., and there he learns how the government abuses and manipulates power for its own ends. Whether within the FBI, where he works, or within the local (in)justice system of Talbert, Oklahoma, where he moves to help solve the murders, Red Hawk encounters first-hand the corruption of government. As Hogan’s character attempts to fight the justice system, another

little-known or perhaps ignored historical fact is revealed: although the white wealthy Founding Fathers guaranteed “inalienable rights” to Americans, the right to vote was granted last to the nation’s first inhabitants, not until 1924. Thus, throughout the novel, set in 1922, the Osages have no legal rights and no lawyers to plead their innocence. Placed against such absolute power of whites against him, Red Hawk decides to return home to South Dakota, where he will renew his strength in his own people’s power of love and community. His return is aborted, however, when he chooses instead to stay with the Grayclouds and to band together with them against the greedy, deceiving whites. This strong character always retains agency and moves freely from place to place, always motivated by a spirit of love for his people and a desire to resist whites’ manipulative power. Red Hawk participates and perseveres in the continual “contestation of colonial domination” (Loomba 12).

At the novel’s end, the Graycloud family, accompanied by Stace Red Hawk, moves for the final time. They flee from the white authorities who, Moses Graycloud knows, will be searching for him for having killed his brother-in-law, John Tate. It will be of no import to the police that Tate killed his Indian wife, Moses’s sister. The white justice system will work as before, excluding non-whites from their right to be heard. The Grayclouds flee also from their burning house, as “[t]he world roared and broke” (375). Rather than seeing “fiery stars that fell to earth, and when they landed, everything burned” (39), the family and Red Hawk watch “it all rising up in the reddened sky, the house, the barn, the broken string of lights” (375). A cosmic reversal of movement has occurred as the world “turned under and over, and now they were left, left to go on, to survive” (344). As the Grayclouds depart in their wagon, leaving their home, their past and future commingle:

No one spoke. But they were alive. They carried generations along with them, into the prairie and through it, to places where no road had been cut before them. They traveled past houses that were like caves of light in the black world. The night was on fire with their pasts and they were alive. (375)

The prophetic conflagration and apocalyptic ending, according to Rainwater, point to “an ahistorical dimension. . . and leave us with a message. . . [that] history is not a fixed set of facts” (46). Rather, it is like a story, always ready to be revised, according to the challenges of the present and the performative abilities of the participants. The past, factual events may be viewed from alternative perspectives, removing obscured truths and opening up possibilities for change.

Hogan’s *Mean Spirit* is, indeed, transformative, as are Silko’s *Ceremony* and Erdrich’s *Tracks*. All three writers have effectively transformed the oral tradition, with its power of the spoken word and its performative aspects, into writing, “reinscribing the audience with new rules for constructing self and the world” (Rainwater xii). All recognize that “words are action” and that language is “a powerful force of creation and destruction” (xiii). In addition, Silko, Erdrich, and Hogan have created strong characters who recognize their own responsibility in re-weaving this fragile world together; Tayo, Nanapush, and Michael Horse know that they must not become mere victims, solely blaming whites for their people’s devastating losses. In *Ceremony*, Tayo chooses not to fall prey to the witchery that tempts him to kill Emo and to continue the downward spiral toward destruction. Erdrich’s narrator Nanapush accepts the responsibility of himself and his tribe, as they “stumbled toward the government bait” falling prey to “liquor and the dollar bill” (Erdrich 4). Similarly, Hogan’s Michael Horse, using the collective “we,” recognizes his and his fellow Osages’ errors: “‘It was a fatal ignorance we had of our place; we

did not know the ends to which the others would go to destroy us. We didn't know how much they were moved by the presence of money'" (341). Although these fictional characters, along with historical American Indian counterparts, did not at first ascertain the overbearing power of the whites or their insatiable greed for land and money, they ultimately accept the outcomes.

In this chapter, such insatiable greed and overbearing power have proven to be the most salient characteristics of collective whites and certainly the most destructive. In Silko's *Ceremony*, the urgent need for uranium, which happens to be found on Navajo and Pueblo land, overrides any concerns for the inhabitants or the environment. For Erdrich's band of Ojibwe in *Tracks*, timber is the natural resource required for the colonizers' construction of cities; thus, the felling of Fleur Pillager's trees plays a climactic role. Even though Fleur exerts her own type of power against the lumber-company whites, she loses her land to them. In Hogan's *Mean Spirit*, rapacious whites go to any lengths, including murder, to obtain Osage oil. Exhibiting Dyer's notion of "enterprise," the whites portrayed collectively in each novel exert their "energy, will, [and] ambition. . . [for] wealth creation" (31). Furthermore, in carrying out their "appropriation of material resources" (Loomba 6), they advance capitalism to the extreme. However, Silko, Erdrich, and Hogan accomplish the feat of not only exposing these qualities of whiteness through their portrayals of whites, but also of "dislodging them/us from the position of power" (Dyer 2). Silko expands whiteness to a cosmic context, thus, defusing some of its power that is granted only by the greater power of the witchery. Erdrich exposes the superiority and pride of whiteness by ridicule through her "almost white" character Pauline. Through Hogan's fluidity of racial constructions and agency of movement by the Osages, whiteness is displaced. Thus, through fiction, these writers demonstrate that they "are not mere victims but active agents in



history, innovators of new ways, of Indian ways, of being and speaking and authoring in this world created by colonial contact” (Womack 6).

## CHAPTER 3

### WHITENESS WITH A DIFFERENCE: INDIVIDUAL PORTRAYALS OF WHITES

Change, a concept universally understood and accepted as “given,” becomes foregrounded in postcolonialist perspectives on literary works. In much of twentieth-century American Indian literature, change is not only called for but is enabled and enacted in a multiplicity of ways. As discussed in Chapter Two, in Silko’s *Ceremony*, Betonie tells Tayo, that “after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies” (126). As the world shifted and changed, the “people” had to adapt in order to survive in this web of a world “filled with the intricacies of a continuing process” (34). Similarly, Erdrich’s master storyteller Nanapush affirms the necessity of change, as he ends *Four Souls*, a continuation of *Tracks*: “Even our bones nourish change, and even . . . such people as we, the Anishinaabeg, can sometimes die, or change, or change and become” (210). In Hogan’s *Mean Spirit*, the pattern of movement indicates a trope of change, as Indian and non-Indian characters move fluidly between and beyond physical and cultural boundaries.

Once explorers set foot onto (Native) American soil, such boundaries became what Mary Louise Pratt terms as “contact zones,” or spaces “in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Such inevitable contact necessitates change of all peoples involved, and in America, despite the

“radical inequality” of white, coercive European settlers and the Native inhabitants, whites, too, were irrevocably changed. In short, all have become “different.”

This term has taken on a multitude of meanings, especially since the advent of postcolonialist and race theory. In the context of colonialism, “difference” has been used to apply to “Others” encountered by Western Europeans in their acts of exploration and colonization. From this perspective, whites, as members of the dominant culture, are not “different”; that description applies only to non-whites. A result of this one-sided judgment “implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject” (Dyer 13). In addition, as Richard Dyer notes, “Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West, . . . but it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them” (4). Therefore, he urges the dismantling of whiteness, to see it, “see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule” (4). Although Dyer scrutinizes whiteness in the context of white culture, I will explore it within a “different” context—that of twentieth-century American Indian literature. Having examined writers’ collective portrayals of whites in the first two chapters, I will move to individual portrayals of characters in the last two, in order to view whiteness in “its particularity and limitedness.”

To be sure, in the hundreds of novels by American Indians, literally thousands of white characters are portrayed; thus, in this single chapter I must be highly selective. To this end, I have chosen characters that reveal important insights into whiteness itself, as well as ways it is unmasked in these contexts. I will begin with categories of white characters that generally coincide to stereotypical representations arising out of their positions of authority, such as

government officials, educators, and doctors. These characters often exert their power over Indians in numerous ways, reinforcing racial inequalities. Finally, I will explore a range of white characters who do not “fit” a specific type, but rather reveal a multitude of “difference.” The writers selected have imaginatively inscribed multifaceted, ever-changing characters. These characters enact Erdrich’s command, delivered through June Morrissey: ““You got to be different”” (*Love Medicine* 4). Transcending the temptation to portray whites merely stereotypically, American Indian writers have created characters who are richly “different.”

In many twentieth-century American Indian literary works, white government employees, whether on the national, state, municipal, or tribal level generally play minor and often humorous roles. As Vine Deloria, Jr. states in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, “One of the best ways to understand a people is to know what makes them laugh. . . . Irony and satire provide much keener insights into a group’s collective psyche and values than do years of research” (146). Some of the most incisive humorous portrayals of whites by American Indian writers appear in this category of government officials or employees. Almost always siding with fellow whites, these characters exhibit prejudiced attitudes, showing little regard for justice or fairness when it comes to Indians. Of all the white characters in the literary works to follow, these are the most stereotyped and satirized, revealing support for Deloria’s assertion. Because it is at the hands of this group of whites that Indians have received the most violently abusive treatment throughout American history, it is this group that becomes the prime target for Native writers. Perhaps it is their unworthiness of being developed into dynamic characters that prompts American Indian writers to portray these whites primarily through parodies, satires, and stereotypes.

Sherman Alexie is well-known for his ability to find and express humor in any situation, and he does just that in his satirical, stereotypical portrayals of whites. In *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven*, Alexie allows his comical character Thomas Builds-the-Fire, to be put on trial. His crime, as stated by “a man in a BIA suit,” involves a ““storytelling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth”” (93). As the BIA man confers with his colleagues, they decide that they need to charge Thomas with at least a felony to put him away, but they are not sure what to choose: ““Inciting a riot? Kidnapping? Extortion? Maybe murder”” (94). Of course, they have to go through the formality of a trial, and this is reported in the “*original court transcript*” (95). Thomas, playing the role of one of the 800 horses captured by Colonel George Wright on September 8, 1858, recounts the tale of this massacre and recites verbatim the letter justifying this action. For no good reason other than payback to a Spokane chief for “stealing horses and cattle from the settlers and from the government” (96), Wright slaughters most of the horses. The one “played” by Thomas Builds-the-Fire is spared after courageous feats of bucking and throwing off every white soldier who mounted him: ““They could not break me. Some may have wanted to kill me for my arrogance, but others respected my anger, my refusal to admit defeat. I lived that day, even escaped Colonel Wright, and galloped into other histories”” (98). In his imaginative re-telling of this historical event, Alexie contrasts the ridiculous antics of Colonel Wright and his white soldiers with the brave resistance of the Spokane “horse.”

The trial continues, and in his cross-examination, when asked where he was on May 16, 1858, Thomas tells of his first battle as a sixteen-year-old warrior named Wild Coyote. Although Colonel Steptoe had tried to negotiate with the Spokane, their ““war chiefs would not

settle for anything short of blood. You must understand these were days of violence and continual lies from the white man. Steptoe said he wanted peace between whites and Indians, but he had cannons and had lied before, so we refused to believe him at this time” (100). Builds-the-Fire continues the tale of this Spokane victory while complimenting the white soldiers for their courage. Although some survived and managed to escape, many Spokane warriors did not mind and ““were happy for them. They had fought so well that they deserved to live another day”” (101). The prosecuting attorney then asks Thomas how many soldiers he killed that day, and Thomas’s answer is two. Thus, Thomas (or Wild Coyote) is sentenced to “two concurrent life terms in the Walla Walla State Penitentiary” (102) for having murdered two white soldiers in 1858. Again, through his humorous portrayal of this trial, Alexie has succeeded in ridiculing those employed by the white government, the soldiers as well as the judge, and in exalting Indians (specifically, the Spokane). His playful juxtaposition of past events and present courtroom antics, as well as of the oral tradition of storytelling and the court transcripts, provides a piercing caricature of “white” justice.

In “The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor,” Alexie parodies a white police officer, who pulls over the (Indian) narrator for not signaling properly “for a turn a few blocks back” (164). The narrator notes, “That was interesting because I had been driving down a straight highway for over five miles. . . . But I knew to play along with his game. All you can hope for in these little wars is to minimize the amount of damage” (164-65). This “play” results in repartee between the white cop and narrator, with the latter always gaining the upper hand, at least, verbally. Apologizing while stereotyping himself, the narrator says, “[Y]ou know how it is. I was listening to the radio, tapping my foot. It’s those drums, you know?” (165). Faced

with the inability to arrest the narrator for not having his required papers or for drinking, the police officer sees Norma in the front seat and says, “Washington State has a new law against riding as a passenger in an Indian car” (165). After paying the officer off, with “four twenties, a ten, eight dollar bills, and two hundred pennies in a sandwich bag” (166), Norma and the narrator “threaten” the officer: “I might just send a letter to your commanding officer. . . [writing that you were] polite, courteous, and above all, legal as an eagle” (166). This infuriates the officer, who throws the bag of pennies back, and Norma and the narrator watch him “drive off, breaking four or five laws as he flipped a U-turn, left rubber, crossed the center line, broke the speed limit, and ran through a stop sign without lights and siren” (166-67). Alexie portrays the white police officer fulfilling his own stereotypes while the Indian narrator and Norma laugh and redeem the incident: “It was a good thing that the trooper threw that change back at us because we found just enough money to get us home” (167).

Also portraying white police officers and guards stereotypically and usually humorously, Louise Erdrich sprinkles their antics throughout her novels. Officer Lovchik appears in *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*, usually searching futilely for the elusive Gerry Nanapush. Upon one of his escapes, Gerry jumps from a three-story window, lands on Lovchik’s car, and bounces off. The white officer, once more missing his would-be captive, “released several rounds into the still trees below him” (*Love Medicine* 209-10), carrying out his stereotypical duty, regardless of the need. This same Lovchik appears in *The Beet Queen* as he appears in Mary Adare’s butcher shop to question her about her incident with Dot’s teacher: “Officer Ronald Lovchik. . . was a tall, sad, soft-shouldered man with a horror of confronting criminals. . . . He’d always had a hopeless crush on Sita . . . he wrote Sita letters and sent small yellow boxes of Whitman’s

chocolates” (189-90). It is his continual crush on Sita that prompts him to relent and give Mary and Celestine only a warning ticket as they speed to the Beet Parade. Upon seeing the dead Sita propped up in the front seat, he smiles and says, ““Morning, Sita. . . . I won’t ticket you. . . . First warning. That’s all” (295. Blinded by both his lovesickness and ineptitude, Officer Lovchik becomes the stereotypical white cop, Erdrich’s parody of white law enforcement.

In *Tales of Burning Love*, Erdrich’s police officers, also looking for Gerry Nanapush, display other characteristics of power abuse and disregard for justice. After warning with bullhorns and breaking down the door, the cops ransack the apartment shared by Dot and Shawn Nanapush and recently vacated by Gerry. Two of them question Shawn, who is determined not to divulge the whereabouts of her father: ““Listen, Shawn. We know your dad was here. He probably wanted to see you, and that’s just fine, but you probably know he escaped and we have to take him back. . . . [W]e really need to find him before some of the others. They’re. . . I guess you’d say trigger-happy. . . . Shawn, was your daddy here?”” (398). Shawn, thinking the whole time about how to save her father, realizes that this last question reveals the officers’ lie; they do not *really* know he was there. She responds, lying herself, ““My dad’s an asshole. . . . I’m scared to death of him and so’s my mom. If he ever came around I’d call 911”” (399). The officers take the bait and cease their search.

Another lying police officer, Sheriff Hock, plays a role in one of Erdrich’s “white” novels, *The Master Butchers Singing Club*. Fitting the stereotypical, fat and bulky police officer, Sheriff Hock helps himself to the doughnuts in the shop where he confronts Delphine concerning her father’s supposed role in the deaths of the Shavers, found in his cellar. Later, Hock arrests Roy, the father, on a trumped-up charge of stealing morphine for Eva’s pain. In an attempt to



trap Delphine into divulging information concerning her father, Sheriff Hock fails to mention to her that Roy's incarceration is for the morphine rather than for murder. However, his ruse does not work; Delphine discovers the real charge and confronts the sheriff with the evidence that this "theft" had been reported and was being paid off. Hock, "subtly disappointed, rocked back on his heels and lied that before he could get word to Sal Birdy, the drugstore owner had reported the theft to the state commission" (190). Concluding that "[t]his is only a formality," Sheriff Hock . . . walked off in an air of slight embarrassment" (191). His white pride and arrogance will not allow him to admit to any incompetence or deceit, fulfilling the stereotype of people in such positions, regardless of the race of their subordinates.

Another white sheriff who lives up to the stereotypes appears in David Treuer's *Little*, a richly layered novel detailing the lives and tragedies of a Wisconsin band of Ojibwe. The sheriff and coroner are called away from their Friday night high school hockey game, having "the misfortune and displeasure of having to travel forty miles from the county seat to the small reservation town they both believed was populated with nothing but drunks" (140). It is these two whites, however, who have "whiskey in their thermoses of hot chocolate" (140) as they leave the game to investigate "a dead priest they both knew to be as drunk as they believed his whole congregation of Indians to be" (141). Both of these men, mad at having to leave the game and travel too far to get the game on the radio, "upon arriving at the icy cold church. . . quickly decided it was an accidental drowning, put the body in the back of the coroner's hearse, and with the sheriff's lights and sirens going they raced at one hundred and ten miles per hour back into radio reception to find out the score" (141). Like Alexie's cop who speeds away, breaking all sorts of traffic laws, so does this white sheriff; after all, the outcome of a hockey game is more

important than a dead priest on an Indian reservation. Treuer not only portrays a stereotypical white sheriff, but also reveals the sheriff's stereotyping of Indians, complicating the act of portrayals.

Although stereotypically portrayed in Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace*, a white border guard acts in such a way as to prompt Lipsha to look beneath the surface and beyond the immediate consequences. The bumbling, yet lovable character, Lipsha Morrissey, is stopped as he and Shawnee Ray attempt to cross "the checkpoint people from the reservation always breezed through when they went up to Canada" (31). However, for Lipsha, this proves to be a difficult, destiny-altering event. Finding a seed, a brick of Zelda's pemmican fruitcake, and Nector's pipe, the border guard arrests Lipsha and refuses to listen to any argument: "I've heard it all and I've seen it all. But this is a pipe and I know hash" (34). Lipsha watches in horror as the guard removes the parts of the sacred pipe from its bag and proceeds to connect them. Realizing that this insensitive guard is "the first non-Indian who ever attached that pipe together" (35) and that he carelessly lets the eagle feather touch the ground (35), Lipsha fears that the "sky would crash to earth" (35). Although it does not, Lipsha reflects:

When I think of all of the uncertainties to follow, the collisions with truth and disaster, I want to dive, to touch and lift that broad feather. I want to go back in time and . . . separate the pipe, swallow that one lone seed. And yet, as there is no retreating from the moment, the only art left to me is understanding how I can accept the consequence. For the backwardness, the wrongness, the brush of heaven to the ground in dust, is a part of our human nature. Especially mine, it appears. (37)

The stereotypical, racially profiling border guard becomes a force and figure of destiny in his callous disregard for sacred Indian traditions. Yet, even the laughable, trickster-like Lipsha can see that the guard's "backwardness" and "wrongness" are not peculiar to the white race; all share in profaning the sacred. It "is a part of our human nature," and, like Nanapush, as noted in Chapter 2, Lipsha takes responsibility for such "wrongness." In fact, he, too, profanes the sacred by trading the pipe to Lyman for Shawnee Ray's affection and colluding in the development of Pillager land for a casino. Erdrich, in her complexities of characterizations, does not stop with mere stereotypes; ramifications of whites' materialism and greed in dealing with the Indians infect all.

Stereotypes are also broken and difference is displayed when white governmental authorities begin to sympathize with Indian characters, as shown in D'Arcy McNickle's early twentieth-century novel *The Surrounded*. Although McNickle introduces two stereotypical white law enforcers, the game warden and Sheriff Quigley, the white Indian agent Parker is different. The game warden, "a slow-speaking, gray-eyed, unexpectedly pleasant sort of man—on the surface at least" (124), threatens to arrest Archilde and Louis for killing a doe. At the moment that Louis reaches for his gun, the warden shoots him, only to be killed by Archilde and Louis's mother, Catherine Leon, with a hatchet. It is the cover-up of this death that arouses suspicion in Sheriff Quigley, whose name "could frighten most Indians, for the Sheriff had a reputation. . . . He was a sheriff out of the Old West. He knew the type—he had read of those hard-riding, quick-shooting dispensers of peace, he had heard stories about them—and he was intent on being all of them in himself" (117). Even the white Indian agent, Horace Parker, dislikes Quigley, seeing him as "one of the last survivals of the 'Old West,' one who carried with

him out of the past a grudge against all Indians” (280). Thus, although McNickle crafts two white authorities as the usual stereotypes, he allows the white agent Parker to deprecate the sheriff, portraying a white with a difference.

Parker, at least initially, acts out the role of a good white Indian agent; he trusts Archilde and believes his claim that he is innocent of the death and disappearance of the game warden. In addition, Parker “liked his job and he liked his Indian wards. He saw their helplessness and realized, without getting excited about it, that he was of little use to them. He did what he could but at every turn he was hampered by a system which penalized initiative and by the Indians’ own poor understanding of what was expected of them” (151). In the end, however, Parker begins to suspect the worst and teams up with Sheriff Quigley and La Ronde, the head of the Indian police force, to search for Archilde, who, on Elise’s insistence, has fled to the mountains. Although Archilde tells his lover Elise that they should not have run away, he stays with her, allowing himself to be carried along by circumstances. When Archilde, his nephews Mike and Narcisse, and Elise are found, Quigley approaches them to take them in. Elise manages to shoot the Sheriff, which brings the other law enforcement agents to the scene. Parker, once a sympathizer, reverts to a stereotypical role, and in his rage hurls these remarks: ““I believed in you, Archilde—and this is what came of it! . . . You had everything, every chance, and this is the best you could do with it! A man gets pretty tired of you and all your kind”” (296). Granted, Parker’s trust in Archilde was betrayed; after all, hiding a body, lying about it, and being an accessory to two murders are criminal acts. Moreover, rather than carrying out his own plan to turn himself in, Archilde deservedly falls into hands of the law. However, Parker, overcome by anger at himself for having believed Archilde, re-directs this anger at all Indians. As Mike and

Narcisse slip away from him, Parker swears: “‘It’s too damn bad you people never learn that you can’t run away. It’s pathetic—’” (296-97). The “good” white agent, who at first refuses to stereotype Archilde, now denigrates and objectifies him, leading to the fatalistic ending of the novel: “Archilde, saying nothing, extended his hands to be shackled” (297).

The ending, according to Louis Owens in *Other Destinies*, reinforces the futility of achieving true understanding between the two races. Claiming that the Indian characters in the novel “seem both helpless to control their own destinies and hopelessly trapped in that condition” (66), Owens traces the recurrent motif of helplessness and hopelessness. He states, “Again and again in the novel, understanding fails and something goes inexplicably wrong for the Indians, as if they are in the grip of an incomprehensible fate—as if, in fact, McNickle’s Indians are playing out their tragic roles in the American epic” (65). Owens, throughout *Other Destinies*, asserts that in “the American epic,” cross-cultural “conflict is epitomized through conflicting discourses, through breakdowns in communication and understanding, failures in articulation” (8). Responses of each culture to this conflict are diametrically opposed; American Indians, in general, respond with subversion or silence while “the white culture shown in fiction by Native Americans relies more heavily upon privileged discourse to assert its dominance” (8). Thus, Archilde’s silent offering of his wrists to be shackled and Parker’s bitter epithets for Archilde’s entire race reveal the playing out of this breakdown in communication. The white agent asserts his dominance, and the Indian silently succumbs.

Understanding between American Indians on the reservations and their white agents proves to be a key factor in achieving at least the possibility of a peaceful coexistence. Juxtaposing Louise Erdrich’s Indian agent Jewett Parker Tatro with Major Laban J. Miles, an

agent to the Osages depicted by John Joseph Mathews, underscores the importance of such understanding. Tatro, a fictional Indian agent for a band of North Dakota Ojibwe, fits the stereotype of white governmental authorities driven by their own greed. Major Miles, on the other hand, whose journal forms the basis of Mathews's *Wah'Kon-Tah*, strives to understand the Osages while attempting "to lead them down the white world's road" (Ruoff 73). The motives of each character drive their disinclination or desire to be different.

Although white characters portrayed in Erdrich's works rarely conform to stereotypes, Tatro proves to be one of the exceptions. He is seen in *Four Souls* as the legal owner of Fleur Pillager's land. Bent on revenge for John James Mauser's having taken her land, Fleur marries Mauser, has his son, and divorces him; she then regains the land title and returns to the reservation. Discovering that Mauser neglected to pay the taxes on the land, Fleur finally learns that Tatro found a legal loophole and procured the land. Though a former Indian agent, Tatro now owns a bar on the reservation, where poker is played continuously. Nanapush, narrating Fleur's story, characterizes Tatro:

For a man who had lived among us for thirty years he had not learned much, but that wasn't why he stayed, anyway, to learn anything or know anything or even acquire things, though he did, as by now our most beautiful and even sacred objects hung upon the walls of his bar. They were either won in the poker game or traded to him for hard liquor—fair and square, we could not dispute that. (190)

It is evident from Nanapush's words that Tatro does not at all concern himself with understanding these people he exploits; on the contrary, he bleeds from them their most prized possessions and hangs them on his walls. Although constantly saying that he will leave, Tatro

stays without knowing why. Nanapush knows, however, that “what held him was the pain itself. It had got into and afflicted him. It had seeped down upon him from his loaded walls” (191). This pain takes its toll on Tatro, mentally and physically, as he stares listlessly out the window, not even recognizing his own eyes reflected there. He looks “all hollow-eyed and bluish gray from lack of sleep and smoky air. He was skinny and wrecked, with a drift of gray hair, but he would live to be a hundred, probably, people said. That kind of old whiteman always did” (191). Stereotyping Tatro as “that kind of old whiteman,” Erdrich parodies (some) whites’ commodification of Indians by collecting artifacts for museums, an act certainly worthy of criticism. In fact, it is one of Jewett Parker Tatro’s artifacts that plays a central role in Erdrich’s 2005 novel, *The Painted Drum*. Interestingly, although Erdrich stereotypes the Indian Agent Tatro in *Four Souls*, in her latest novel, she crafts a distant relation of his, Kit Tatro, as one who is relentlessly seeking his supposed Indian roots. Expressing his obsession to make some connection, Kit is perhaps one Tatro who will succeed at being different.

A truly different Indian agent, Major Laban J. Miles, is found in *Wah’Kon-Tah: The Osage and the White Man’s Road*. The writing of *Wah’Kon-Tah* is in itself different in that a mixed-blood author, John Joseph Mathews, uses the journal of a white Indian agent to the Osages, to create this literary work. Major Miles, sent to the Osage reservation in Oklahoma near the end of the nineteenth century, is portrayed as kind and compassionate, always acting in what he truly believed were the best interests of the Osages. Insisting on education of the tribe so to prepare them to walk “the white man’s way,” Miles always consults and receives permission from parents of Osage children before sending them to Indian boarding school. Although he feels a pang to separate children from parents, Miles believes it is best for the

future: “But for the benefits which he believed would come to them he felt that a few months or years of unhappiness would bear fruit in the Indian’s preparation for the final contact with the world of the white man” (101). Unlike some white Indian agents, Major Miles desires above all to serve the Indians. He firmly believes that they will be assimilated into white society, and often acts in ways that he thinks will benefit them when this time comes. He deeply hopes that they will be able to take what is good about the white man’s ways without revoking all of their own valuable traditions, and will become “Americans”—adding to this great country’s people.

In addition, Miles befriends individuals in the tribe and truly seeks to understand them. He learns how to communicate with his beloved Osages, always listening first, keeping silent until the right time, then speaking from his heart. The narrator explains Miles’s process of understanding: “First through his beliefs and then through his broad sympathy with humanity, and later through an intense desire to understand, he had begun to appreciate [the Osages]” (63). His hope is that others will “eventually come to an understanding of the Indian people; they need only understand them as he understood them, to experience the same emotions he experienced” (78). A key to understanding is a refusal to succumb to stereotyping, which Miles despises:

He thought there was nothing more sickening than the ‘trash’ that had been written about the Indian; the ‘poor Indian,’ and his treatment by the government. . . He was afraid of books which mentioned the ‘noble red man,’ and made no distinctions among the vastly differing tribes; as though one would refer to a Frenchman or an Italian only as Europeans, attributing to all of them the same characteristics and tendencies. (79)



In comparing such essentializing of Indians to a similar treatment of all whites, Miles reveals a difference, one desperately needed in cross-cultural mediation. Furthermore, adapting his Christianity to the Osages' belief in Wah'Kon-tah, Miles exhibits his own willingness to change.

However, despite all his years of serving the Osages the best he could, even Major Miles cannot not prevent the ill effects of assimilation. This tribe had the rare experience of maintaining the mineral rights to their oil-rich land, but Major Miles is apprehensive about the way the wealth will affect the tribe. He witnesses the contagious quality of whites' materialism, along with the harmful effects of alcohol on his beloved Osages. He realizes "that this great wealth was the last play of the fate that pursued the Osage people. . . . [and] that with the interest of the people at heart he had played into the hands of the white man against whom he had spent years protecting the Indian" (324-25). In the face of powers greater than he, Major Miles must capitulate. However, Mathews, in his fictional account of Miles, crafts the end of the agent's life into one of nostalgia. The narrator recounts that after his removal as agent, Miles lives in the town at the edge of the reservation, where he tells stories to the youth of the Osages of their brave ancestors, keeping the oral tradition alive until his death. It is as though the writer feels compelled to leave the life of this great man untarnished.

Stereotypical white government authorities, whether local law enforcement officers or federal Indian agents, populate American Indian fiction, often ridiculed, sometimes reviled, rarely respected. Exceptions occur, however, not only in fiction but also in history, and Native writers do reveal those whites who choose to be different in their dealings with America's indigenous peoples. Other whites who have historically infiltrated tribal communities, educators and doctors, have displayed such similar qualities that they, too become "worthy" of stereotyping

in fictional works. When these characters do attempt to break out of their group's expected roles and actions, American Indian writers note such actions and fairly portray these "different" characters.

White educators, perhaps most often associated with the traumatic effects of Indian boarding school, become targets for bitter criticism, and rightly so, by American Indian writers. In *Learning to Write "Indian,"* Amelia Katanski reiterates the boarding school rationale: "to monitor and restrict representations of Indianness so that students would affirm their assimilative project and embrace a sense of tribal culture as inferior and 'savage'" (7). As Katanski exposes the work of such white administrators and educators, non-Indian readers can see that polemic against these whites is merited. In forcing children to revoke their own tribal languages under threat of corporal punishment, some white educators participated in a type of cultural genocide. However, as Katanski and numerous others note, this experience served to effect pan-tribal unity and resistance to "the enemy's language," which was eventually used, to repeat Krupat's words, to "write—as they fight—back" (*Voice* 4). An entire "boarding school repertoire" (Katanski 216) has evolved in American Indian literature, which is now rife with tropes on whites' education and its enduring effects. Whether attending government-run Indian schools, desegregated public schools, or parochial schools, American Indian characters contend with prejudice and stereotyping in the seemingly endless assimilation process.

As noted by Katanski and others, D'Arcy McNickle, in *The Surrounded*, contributes to the boarding-school repertoire with some of his characters' receiving their "white" education. Archilde's mother is taught by the Sisters to read, write, sew, cook, clean, and mind her manners, all skills that she finds useless once she leaves the school. Her grandsons, Mike and Narcisse,

attend the same school but suffer emotionally and physically from their experiences. Mike, the younger boy, returns home after having been punished for his defiance. He is locked him up in a dark room, which is rumored to have the crown of thorns, bones, and a skull inside. His screams result in his being placed in the infirmary and a week-long prayer vigil's being observed, ostensibly because Mike had been visited by the devil (188-90). His fear of the dark, upon returning home, continues, and he and Narcisse refuse to go back to school. At the end of the novel, they are the ones who escape, "who flee to the mountains and remain free," providing the only "hope for cultural survival" (Owens 73). From their traumatic experience with McNickle's cruel, insensitive white educators, we can see that it is not the white education that offers hope but the boys' resistance to it.

Even such tragic effects of white education can be turned into humor, however. As Vine Deloria, Jr. notes, "Indians have found a humorous side of nearly problem" (174), and have been able to strengthen pan-tribal bonds through such humor. Moreover, Deloria affirms that "[w]hen a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anybody drive them to extremes, then it seems to me that that people can survive" (167). Sherman Alexie and Louise Erdrich, both masters of "Indian humor," wittily portray white teachers, but in markedly different ways.

In his inimitable, satirical style, Sherman Alexie writes of the "Indian Education" of one of his narrators, Junior Polatkin, in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Alexie breaks down each grade, from first through twelfth, and provides poignant snapshots of stereotypical educators. In the second grade, "Betty Towle, missionary teacher, redheaded and so ugly" (172), makes Junior "stay in for recess fourteen days straight" (172). When Junior

draws a Halloween “picture of her riding a broom with a scrawny cat on the back” (173), she gets so angry that she tells Junior “that her God would never forgive. . . [him] for that” (173). Also angered when Junior gets all the junior high spelling words right, Miss Towle tells him he has to learn respect, makes him eat his spelling test, and sends a note home telling his parents to either cut his braids or keep him home. Junior ends his second grade account with these words: “My parents came in the next day and dragged their braids across Betty Towle’s desk. ‘Indians, indians, indians.’ She said it without capitalization. She called me ‘indian, indian, indian.’ And I said, *Yes, I am. I am Indian, Indian, I am* ” (173). In the fourth grade, a slightly more sympathetic white teacher, Mr. Schluter, tells Junior, ““You should be a doctor when you grow up. . . . So you can come back and help the tribe. So you can heal people”” (174). Other choices to be made by educated, assimilated Indians remain to be explored, at least in the eyes of stereotypical white educators. Even a non-white, Chicano teacher appears in Alexie’s “Indian Education,” falling into the stereotyping trap. After a basketball game where he “had scored twenty-seven points and pulled thirteen rebounds” (178), Junior collapses at a dance. He is revived by some white friends, but then hears this teacher’s question: ““What’s that boy been drinking? I know all about these Indian kids. They start drinking real young”” (178). The narrator closes the ninth-grade school year’s account with this insight: “Sharing dark skin doesn’t make two men brothers” (178). Whiteness is more than skin deep.

Whiteness abounds in Louise Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen*, set off the reservation and populated with mostly white characters. Like Alexie, Erdrich satirizes a white teacher; the difference, however, is that the repartee portrayed in *The Beet Queen* is between two whites, the teacher and Mary Adare, rather than between a white teacher and Indian student. When

Celestine, the (mixed-blood) mother of Dot Adare, discovers that Dot is in trouble with Mrs. Shumway, Mary attempts to become Dot's confidant. Sly Dot knows the power she has over her aunt and embellishes the story of her teacher's cruel means of punishment. With glee, she describes the naughty box: "It's a red box in the back of the room, underneath the clock. Mrs. Shumway can fit lots of children inside of it. She pushes you in and slams down the lid. It's big. It's made of wood. It has *splinters*" (185). Believing the worst of this teacher, Mary drives to the school to accost Mrs. Shumway "way before she slunk off, to her duplex or wherever Argus first-grade teacher slunk to when they had emptied their naughty boxes and ground their red pencils sharp as needles" (186). Mary spies the red box, just as Dot described, and manages to cram Mrs. Shumway inside, with the teacher yelling that the naughty box was merely a box on the blackboard, where she wrote names of misbehaving children. Although Mary is duped, she leaves the school with this thought: "I did so with the secure conviction that I'd revenged Dot, that I'd taught Shumway an unforgettable lesson, and, in that way, done something for all of the children of Argus, who would be forced to spend one school year of their lives in her hands" (189). Although this white teacher turns out to be right, Erdrich draws upon the legacy of boarding-school teachers' cruelty through Dot's imaginings. The entire scene becomes a travesty of miscommunication and misunderstanding, and most readers, whether white or not, will exult in the image of this teacher in the big red "naughty" box, banging on the top, yelling to be set free. Erdrich steps back from mere stereotyping of white teachers and broadens the perspective; Mrs. Shumway, not the stereotypical, malevolent, boarding-school-like educator, still must pay for this past.

The most positive portrayal of a white educator is shown in D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*. Mr. Duffield, Archilde's music teacher, breaks out of his strict, boarding-school role and subversively provides music instruction, which is outside of the curriculum. Although Louis Owens sees the only hope in the ending of novel as Mike and Narcisse's refusal to return to boarding school, I see Archilde's experience as one of affirmation, thanks to one white educator.

Archilde reflects on his four years spent at a federal boarding school in Montana, where he worked as an orderly for the superintendent, Mr. Snodgrass. Occasionally, he would hear strains from a piano or violin coming from the printing shop, where Mr. Duffield, "a musician by nature and a printer by accident" (McNickle 90), gave music lessons. Two white educators are portrayed here; the stereotype, Mr. Snodgrass, readily abuses students verbally and corporally, as needed. The other, Mr. Duffield, shatters the stereotype and dedicates himself to offering music lessons surreptitiously to promising Indian boys. It does seem, however, that Mr. Snodgrass appreciates Mr. Duffield because when he learns that the printer/music teacher wants to teach Archilde, he willingly allows this. He even gives Archilde sound advice: "Always take an interest in your work. No matter how much you dislike a job, or how unimportant it seems to you, if it is your job, do it with a will and to the best of your ability. That is the way to make yourself valuable and to win success" (93-94). Working with Mr. Duffield proves to provide the most valuable lessons Archilde learned at the school; he finds his passion in music, which allows him to make a living, at least for awhile. When Archilde shares his story of Mr. Duffield later with Father Grepilloux, the old priest asks if the music teacher was the first adult to make friends with Archilde. Upon reflection, "Archilde realized that it was so. Mr. Duffield had never

abused him, had taken no advantage of him; instead, he had treated him with adult consideration free of treacle” (96). In fact, it is Archilde’s passion for music that offers him promise of future study in Europe; however, this promise remains unfulfilled at the end of the novel.

McNickle enlarges and complicates the “boarding-school repertoire,” and thus, provides an accurate portrayal of white educators in general. Moreover, his four characters who are subjected to this type of education respond in notably different ways. Catharine renounces the secular and religious teachings of the Sisters, dying a “pagan.” Yet, as Archilde reflects at her death, he notes that “death was something besides a tearing away; death for his mother, at this moment, just as she had turned her back on all those teachers who had come over the mountains—it was the triumph of the one against many; it was the resurrection of the spirit” (272). This thought prompts him to consider Mike and Narcisse and his determination to shelter them from the Fathers although he does not know how: “He might turn them loose in the mountains, like birds let out of a cage, or like a pair of buffaloes turned out of the Government reserve; he had no doubt that they would survive. But there ought to be something better” (273). This “something better” was glimpsed by Archilde through the “different” teaching of Mr. Duffield, but it is not achieved for him or for his nephews as the novel closes. Thus, the fatalistic ending as noted by Owens, is complicated by the unfulfilled promises of a white education; however, as Katanski claims, this education served its purpose in teaching students “how to write ‘Indian.’” Consequently, the entire realm of American Indian literature has opened up, ensuring the continued survival of these peoples.

Another group of professional whites that are often portrayed stereotypically and bitterly in American Indian literature is that of doctors. Although most tribes' medicine people are highly revered, white doctors in their literature are often portrayed as uncaring and inept. Administering completely different kinds of medicine and treatments from those traditionally used by American Indians, white doctors rarely succeed in healing afflicted Indians. Perhaps more significant is the white doctors' neglect of the spiritual for the mere physical. As Susan Scarberry-Garcia states in *Landmarks of Healing*, "Tribal literatures speak of healing principally as the restoration of harmonious relationships. Assuming the integration of the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of the self, tribal medicine developed ritual therapies that addressed all three" (xi). To the white doctors in much of American Indian literature, such a concept of healing is alien; therefore, they are generally portrayed as impotent. With their scientific, unnatural, individually-focused methods, coupled often with prejudice toward non-whites, they merit disdain and sarcasm from American Indian writers. However, a few American Indian writers provide glimpses of hope for these innovative physicians, opening up a space for change.

In Silko's *Ceremony*, Tayo recounts to Betonie his experience with white doctors during his stay at the hospital, where "[e]verything. . . . was white. Except for me. I was invisible" (123). His invisibility is different from that explained by Richard Dyer, who attributes it to whites: "Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen" (45). This paradox of visibility and invisibility carries risks and proves difficult to sustain. As a non-color, white connotes "emptiness, non-existence and death" (Dyer 45). Interestingly, it is this emptiness that Tayo



experiences. He has been stripped of power and sees himself as “white smoke,” as merely an “outline” that is “hollow inside” (Silko, *Ceremony* 14-15). The medicine of the white doctors “drained memory out of his thin arms and replaced it with a twilight cloud behind his eyes. . . . If they had not dressed him and led him to the car, he would still be there, . . . invisible in the gray twilight” (15). When the white doctor persists each day in asking Tayo “if he had ever been visible, . . . one day Tayo heard a voice answering the doctor. The voice was saying, ‘He can’t talk to you. He is invisible’” (15). The doctor’s response is a question: “‘It is easy to remain invisible here, isn’t it, Tayo?’” (16). Then, the dispassionate doctor sends Tayo home, presumably as a cure for his invisibility, but the “white” cure does not work.

As Tayo talks with Betonie, he remembers this white hospital, where he felt no fear, heard no voices, had no dreams; thus, he suggests going back there. Betonie answers, revealing his contempt for such a place: “[I]f you are going to do that, you might as well go down there, with the rest of them, sleeping in the mud, vomiting cheap wine, rolling over women. Die that way and get it over with. . . . In that hospital they don’t bury the dead, they keep them in rooms and talk to them” (123). Tayo’s putting himself in the care of white doctors was the same as dying, according to Betonie. Although Tayo is at first reluctant to assent to Betonie’s ceremony, he realizes that he had only been *trying* to believe the white doctors, and that “medicine didn’t work that way, because the world didn’t work that way. His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything” (125-6). The white doctors attempted to cure only in part, only the “I” and “me,” telling Tayo “that he had to think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like ‘we’ and ‘us’” (125). For true healing to take place, according to Paula Gunn

Allen, ceremony is needed, the purpose of which is to *integrate*: “to fuse the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of the other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one” (62). The white doctors treating Tayo were seeking to alienate him from the community, to heal his own, individual psyche, thus advancing the “witchery” of separation.

Not only are the white doctors’ methods viewed as ineffective, but their attitudes toward Indian patients are sometimes shown as callous or dispassionate. A complete lack of compassion on a white doctor’s part is revealed by the narrator of “Every Little Hurricane,” in Sherman Alexie’s *Lone Ranger and Tonto*: “Victor’s mother remembered how the Indian Health Service doctor sterilized her moments after Victor was born” (8). Another white doctor, this time portrayed by Alexie in “Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation,” accepts as “normal for an Indian child” (118) that the narrator’s adopted son James still does not speak at the age of five. After looking James over, the doctor says that nothing is “wrong with him and that he’s just a little slow developing”; the narrator adds, “and that’s what the doctors always say and they’ve been saying that about Indians for five hundred years” (120). Such a condescending, uncaring attitude of white doctors can also be found in David Treuer’s *Little*. When Jeanette, starving and seven months pregnant, becomes ill, Duke and Ellis have no one to turn to for help: “All of the other Indians were as bad off as us. The white people. . . had no reason to care, nothing in it for them” (27). However, Ellis does manage to get a priest and white doctor to visit Jeanette, and the doctor gives Jeanette a cursory examination and a shot. He wipes “his hands with a white kerchief” and states unemotionally, ““She won’t die. . . . She won’t lose her baby either. But she has to eat”” (28). The white doctor who is called upon to

help Archilde's mother Catharine in *The Surrounded* acts similarly. "'We've done all there's to do,' he told Archilde" (273). Archilde understands that a second stroke has affected her brain, and watches as the doctor "rolled down his sleeves, packed his black bag" (273), both acts of finality, bereft of any comforting words. Whether called upon to assist in pregnancy, birth, or death, these white doctors exhibit a lack of compassion for their American Indian patients; even if nothing can be done in these instances, at least the doctors could have spoken comforting words to show that they cared. Instead, however, they merely mutter platitudes, reinforcing stereotypical responses.

At times, white doctors do reveal emotion and varying degrees of sympathy toward Indian patients. Even Alexie, in "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor," portrays a good white doctor, who jokes with Jimmy, the narrator, as he returns from a radiation treatment:

"Jesus," I said to my attending physician. "A few more zaps and I'll be Superman."

"Really?" the doctor said. "I never realized that Clark Kent was a Spokane Indian."

And we laughed, you know, because sometimes that's all two people have in common. (162)

Jimmy appreciates the humor and candor of his doctor, who is quick to tell him that he is "'still dying'" (162), which prompts another laugh. Just as "Indians have found a humorous side of nearly every problem" (Deloria 147), so has this "good white doctor" (163).

Also provoking laughter, but from readers rather than characters, Louise Erdrich facetiously portrays white doctors in *Four Souls*. John James Mauser, longs for a son, yet his

wife Placide is unable to conceive. He sends for Dr. Fulmer, a white “doctor who specialized in male diseases” (36), and Polly Elizabeth, narrator and eavesdropper, recounts the incident. Placide is called in to hear the specialist’s diagnosis; thus, Erdrich portrays him as speaking in convoluted terms so as not to offend Mauser’s wife. Her sister, Polly Elizabeth, overhears all, stating, “I had to bite my lip so as not to offer correct information” (36). She is the one who supplied Placide with the book on “Karezza,” a means of suppressing the sperm, which “could, if sincerely practiced, improve the relations between the sexes and even save marriages” (37). Dr. Fulmer has a difficult time trying to get Placide to confess that “insofar as marital congress is concerned” (37), it simply does not occur. Then, he reaches his scientific conclusion: Mauser “suffers from a locomotor ataxis and melancholic neuralgia complicated by a rare male chlorosis, all brought on by a damming of the sperm!” (39). Erdrich masterfully crafts this white doctor as he speaks in almost unintelligible terms to explain the serious condition, still shocking Placide. “‘Where do you think it goes?’ asked Dr. Fulmer, rather *savagely*. . . . ‘To the brain! To the brain!’” (39; emphasis added). The white doctor turns “savage” in his impatience with the prim, prudish white Placide. Furthermore, Erdrich adds an even more humorous spin of the incident. She seems to be parodying “the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century hysteria diagnoses and treatments of and for women’s hysteria” in portraying this white doctor and “his narrow focus on sperm-caused diseases” (Roemer, E-mail, 19 Nov. 2007). The entire scene exposes the extreme scientific approach to medicine, making a travesty of this white doctor’s supposed sophisticated knowledge.

After Mauser marries Fleur Pillager, and a doctor (this time unnamed) is called in to help with her difficult pregnancy, he acts similarly to the passive, uncaring white doctors as noted

above. Seeing that Polly Elizabeth has already administered whiskey to help Fleur, he states, “‘Crude, but effective. . . . Continue the treatment as required’” (65). He adds, speaking only to Polly Elizabeth, “‘I do not treat servants. . . or Indians’” (65). He walks from the house without another word and does not return, even when threatened by Polly Elizabeth that she will tell Mauser of his sentiments, who will, in turn, tell “‘all who serve with him on the hospital board’” (66). When Fleur and Mauser's son, who appears to be autistic, is taken to white doctors for diagnosis, they pronounce “him normal and even advanced, a credit to a father who sat on the hospital board. . . . they had perhaps been afraid to speak frankly to one who possessed so much power over them individually and over the institution as a whole” (88). These white doctors act according to their own self-serving motives, thus are merely superficial sympathizers to their patients, whether white or Indian.

Another superficially sympathetic white doctor is portrayed satirically in Greg Sarris's *Grand Avenue*. In “The Progress of the Disease,” the narrator Anna describes a painting in the office of Dr. Kriesel: “Against a black background a hand holds a spread of eagle feathers” (27). The white woman doctor tells Anna, “‘That represents healing. . . Betty at the front desk said it's a medicine man. Gives me strength as a doctor. You know, in *this* clinic’” (27). The words and painting of this white doctor, as portrayed from the perspective of a mixed-blood narrator, reveal stereotyping of Indians, yet the doctor believes she is truly helping them. Her attempts at being sympathetic to their “medicine” reveal superficiality; she does not know herself what the painting represents, but must ask Betty. Her emphasis, “in *this* clinic,” exposes her own marking of difference in working with *these* people. Ironically, Anna says to herself “I want to tell her I'm no Indian from the bush, that I'm a Christian and don't believe in any of that old stuff” (27-

8). Unaware that Anna does not fit neatly into her Indian category, the white doctor holds to her own presumptions about the painting: ““You do like it, don’t you?”” (28), she asks Anna, who answers affirmatively, yet falsely. Anna remembers what Dr. Kriesel must always forget: “The conversation always goes the same way. She is confident, knows all about the painting. Then, remembering the kind of news she must tell me, she wilts, slumps in her white coat, listless as a sick gull. Her round blue eyes are like a child’s and search the room, maybe for a picture of something that might tell her what to say” (28). Anna, already aware of the severity of her daughter’s disease, discerns the doctor’s need for strength, which cannot be found in a painting.

The white doctors in Linda Hogan’s *Mean Spirit* display more than a superficial difference as they attempt to act in the Osages’ best interests. Dr. Black is asked by the rich white oilman, John Hale, to give a physical examination to Walker, who owes Hale money. In lieu of collecting his debt, Hale schemes to take out a life insurance policy on the Indian and be named as beneficiary. The doctor, hesitating, reflects upon the situation:

He looked at Hale, then looked out the window at the crowds of people on the busy street, the fast business of oil money changing hands, hawkers selling Indian people useless baubles, and white men collecting on their debts. He didn’t like any of it. He’d written a letter to Washington. The last two Indians who died had insurance policies. One of them named Hale as beneficiary. . . . But in D. C. they’d told him there wasn’t enough evidence. (66)

Although Dr. Black knows that Hale is acting dishonestly, cheating Osages out of their money, land, oil, and even lives, the white doctor takes no more action than his letters and accepts the

situation: “Black didn’t like it but it was the times. What could he do, confront Hale, ask him if her were guilty of murder? . . . He could say that Walker didn’t qualify. But if his suspicions were true, it wouldn’t make a difference; they’d find another way” (66). Resigned, Dr. Black gives in, signs Walker’s clean bill of health, and lets circumstances take their own course. This course becomes increasingly more devastating, and Osages begin to turn back to their old ways and to lose their trust in whites. When Walker does die, they suspect that “the brandy-drinking Doc Black was involved, or at least had lied about the cause of death, and that he was in with those who conspired against them” (170). The people return to their old medicine and to the “part-Indian veterinarian” (170). The white doctor understands, does not blame the Osages, and makes plans to leave. His sympathy for the Osages seems more than superficial, yet not strong enough to propel him to act more decisively in their favor.

In contrast, Dr. Levee, the new white doctor in Watona, displays agency and difference. He, too, signs papers dishonestly, as he confesses to Stace Red Hawk:

“We had a bad case of rabies day before yesterday. A girl. . . . Her mother shot her. To kill her. I knew it. But I pretended I didn’t. After I heard how sick she was, I would have done it myself. . . . Can you imagine having to do that? After I was there, they burned down the house, with the child’s body in it, they were so afraid of catching it. I had to sign the papers. I said she died in the fire.” (250)

Both white doctors affix their signatures as medical authorities fraudulently; thus, both are guilty. The difference in motivation does not excuse Dr. Levee but does provide insights into his character. As the novel progresses and he tends to side with Red Hawk and the Osages, his whiteness separates him and places him with the other suspect whites. A woman complaining

about a pain, seeing Levee, turns away and her face shows “how little trust she had for any science of healing that came from a tradition other than her own” (294). Near the end of the novel, Dr. Levee tells Red Hawk that he is leaving: “I think I was afraid. . . of medicine. It seemed like so much failure, to fail at healing, to see people dies. I thought it would be more. . . . I didn’t even find compassion” (371). When Red Hawk asks if it is different now, Levee answers: “Now the world’s been turned upside down. Now I don’t know the truth from the lie. I’m going back. I lost something, but I found something else. I don’t even know what to call it, except I feel something like love for those sick and dying people now” (371). Dr. Levee and Red Hawk are still together when they discover the commotion at the Grayclouds’ place. Both men go to help, and the last words spoken by Levee are to ask where Stace Red Hawk is going. The answer is “With them” (374); after that, “[t]he world roared and broke” (375), and the Grayclouds and Red Hawk flee “to places where no road had been cut before them” (375). With Hogan’s ending of survival, hope, and movement toward a “new” place, Dr. Levee is not mentioned, yet the trace of his presence remains.

Although most white doctors in these works fit the stereotypes as condescending, dispassionate, and reliant solely on the (white) science of medicine, some do attempt to rise above such traits and treat non-whites sympathetically. Whether these physicians actually succeed in healing their Indian patients, however, is not evident. It is as though, at least for these American Indian writers, traditional healing methods are still deemed superior to “white” ones. However, with a change in heart and attitude toward non-whites, perhaps some doctors can become different.



From viewing portrayals of these simple-to-categorize whites, such as government employees, educators, and physicians, we can see that American Indian writers sometimes stereotype whites and in doing so, expose their attitudes of superiority, privilege, and power. Dyer, however, claims that “the privilege of being white in white culture is *not* to be subjected to stereotyping in relation to one’s whiteness” (11; emphasis added). I contend that these writers succeed in doing just that. Interestingly, Dyer adds that “stereotyping—complex and contradictory though it is . . . does characterize the representation of subordinated social groups and is one of the means by which they are categorized and kept in their place, whereas white people in white culture are given the illusion of their own infinite variety” (12). In my analyses of the works to follow, American Indians, as the “subordinated social groups” not only succeed in stereotyping whites but also in portraying them in “their own infinite variety.” Implicit in this act is the subversion of the dominant by the dominated, as well as the fair, perhaps unmerited recognition of difference.

In *Mean Spirit*, Linda Hogan populates her fictional town of Watona, Oklahoma, with whites of all kinds, from malevolent to compassionate, power-hungry to humble. Some whites “go Native,” several marry Indians, and some act always out of greed and egocentric entitlement. The worst whites, John Hale and his accomplice Mardy Green, manipulate and murder to obtain their wants. A typical get-rich-quick oilman, Hale is described at the beginning of the novel as “a friend to the Indians. . . [who had] always been generous and helpful to his darker compatriots” (22). However, with his murder of Grace Blanket for her oil-rich land, his “friendliness” is turned “upside down,” like the Osage world, which “had turned under and over” (344). Hale is called “the archetypal white man” by Janet St. Clair, who describes Hale as “opportunistic,

exploitative, and devoid of conscience, compassion, and morality. He rapes the land, destroys everyone who stands in his way, and augments his wealth by persuading terminally gullible Indians to name him their beneficiary on the life insurance policies he buys them” (88). When he appears in the courtroom on trial, he sits “tall, almost self-righteous; his circle of stolen money and power had built him far beyond human feeling and, it seemed, far above the law” (Hogan 326). Mardy Green helps Hale with the killings, and when Green appears on the stand, he explains Hale’s rationale: “He simplified the war against the dark-skinned people: they were in the way of progress. Everyone needed the land, the oil, the beef-fattening grass, and the water, and all was fair, he told them. ‘We have to go on, as a race, I mean’” (327). Green later confesses his and Hale’s roles in the complicated string of murders and plots, all created to get money from the Osages. Many whites are implicated, and many more are suspected.

Under suspicion, even though married to Osage women, are whites Will Forrest and John Tate because “[a]nyone was suspect. . . just by the color of their skin. Everyone” (294). Will Forrest truly loves his wife, Nola Blanket, and begins to take an interest in Indian artifacts, which does not please Nola. Although she prefers “silks” and “European imports” (194-95), she still voices her superstitious fears that Will’s purchases ““come from the other side of life”” (195). She begins “to think that she herself, as an Indian woman, represented something old and gone to him, something from another time” (195). Their separateness becomes increasingly apparent, as does Nola’s suspicion of Will. With his untrustworthy father’s investing in Hale’s business ventures and his former friends’ continual contempt for his wife, Forrest appears to live up to the suspicions. Nola eventually kills him, insisting to the end that ““He was one of them”” (365). John Tate, on the other hand, seems to escape suspicion by many, and even his whiteness is

never marked in the novel. However, his vocation, that of photographer, is most likely not one that an Indian would choose. He is often in the background, snapping photos at every event, to the disgust of those around him. Moses Graycloud, whose sister Ruth married John Tate, “never liked Tate. . . . [who was] a small, fussy man with only one eye and every time Moses looked into it, he could see nothing warm, nothing human” (21). At the exhumation of Grace Blanket, Moses forbids Tate to take pictures:

“No photographs.” . . . His glance at John Tate’s face did not waver, but it chilled Moses to look at the small man. He didn’t like anything about him, not his hiding beneath the black curtain and behind the glass camera eye, not how the little man ran horses without mercy until some of them fell, not how he’d married Ruth and moved into the home that had belonged to the Graycloud family. (88)

Moses’s intuition proves true, and in the end, he shoots Tate, who has shot Ruth. Tate was, indeed, “one of them” (375). Murder in *Mean Spirit* is not limited to greedy whites; many are tainted by effects of “contact zone” conflicts.

However, Hogan is aware of the concept of race as more complex than being viewed as “one of us” versus “one of them.” Several of her characters epitomize Omi and Winant’s concept of race “as an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed. . . .” (55). Other whites who marry Osages, do become different, decentering and transforming notions of fixed racial polarities. Floyd, a white, marries Moses Graycloud’s daughter Louise, and attempts to “become” Indian, at least in some aspects, even when Louise does not. Described as “a tense but likable man from Joplin, Missouri, . . . he was in all ways the opposite of Louise. While Lou wanted to rely on what she called ‘White man’s logic,’ Floyd

imitated Indian ways. He had proudly taken the Graycloud name when he married Louise, and he wore his fine blond hair in a ponytail down his back” (Hogan 34-35). Although Floyd makes a living selling bootleg liquor, he eventually gives that up, and Louise returns to her own Osage roots; thus, for both the concept of race is fluid.

For another couple, Pastor Joe Billy and his white wife Martha, racial boundaries also become blurred. Sam Billy, Joe’s father, was “a medicine man for twenty-three years before he’d converted to the Christian faith” (14); it is his influence that motivates Joe to go to seminary. While there, he “married a white society woman against her father’s will, and returned home determined to save and serve his own Indian people” (14). Near the first of the novel, his wife Martha is described as “skinny and frail, and sweating from the heat. Her yellow hair was in a tight, damp bun” (14). However, as the novel continues, she becomes more and more “Indian.” Change is first noted in her attitude: “It was getting so that she preferred the Indians to her own kind of people” (154). Then, even a change occurs in her physical appearance: “Martha had begun to look, in some peculiar way, like an Indian. She wore her long blond hair in a braid down her back. Her face seemed somehow stronger” (175). Eventually, she becomes “like a convert to another faith, and she dropped so fully into this world, that she gave not even a single glance backward at her past” (256). Her Creek husband Joe, however, does look to his past and states: ““It’s killing my faith, all of this [the murders]. I hardly believe my own sermons anymore”” (137). Recalling his father as a medicine man, Joe Billy retrieves Sam’s bat medicine bundle, holds it in his hands and prays: “He felt it speaking to him. It was urgent, he knew, even though he didn’t understand what was being said from inside the leather bag. Something was stirring in there” (137). Finally, by the end of 1922, “a

year of separations . . . and other splittings, mind from heart, body from spirit” (170), Reverend Billy dresses traditionally and resigns from the ministry, returning to his roots while his wife turns away from hers. The fluidity of race parallels Hogan’s motif of movement; in addition, it reveals an insistence on displacing whiteness from its dominance. Finally, with Hogan’s use of interracial marriages, the notion of becoming “one flesh,” a layer to the blending of race is added. These characters enact Omi and Winant’s notion of race as a “complex of social meanings constantly being transformed” (55).

In this year of “splittings,” even John Hale’s white lover, China, becomes different after living with the Osages. “The pale girl. . . so in love with Hale [that] she would have done anything for him” (168), China consents to marry (the ghost of) John Stink. Knowing what few “of the crooked white people” do, that Stink is “one of the richest Indians in the territory” (168), Hale schemes to get his money. Although helped by the facts that most believe Stink to be dead and returned as a ghost and that crazy John Stink has no use for his money, Hale’s plan fails. China, prohibited from marrying Stink since he is legally dead, runs to the oil field to tell Hale. As she arrives, the earth rumbles and she witnesses an explosion, which Hale and his men attempt to plug. China watches in horror, and “the vision of it changed her. It was like watching hell rise up. She knew then, she knew that the earth had a mind of its own. She knew the wills and whims of men were empty desires, were nothing pitted up against the desires of earth” (186). From then on, she becomes less and less “white” and begins “to reject her own people” (246).

These characters have enacted the decentering of race, as called for by Omi and Winant, in their challenge to view race differently. These race theorists see the need “to disrupt and reframe the rigid and bipolar manner in which they [these positions on race] are posed and

debated, and to transcend the presumably irreconcilable relationship between them” (54). For Hogan, race is anything but rigid; her novel becomes an enactment of Omi and Winant’s “racial project,” which “*is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines*” (56). Using the context of the Oklahoma oil-boom of the 1920’s, the whites’ exploitation of land and people, and the unfailing attempts of the Osages to survive and thrive, Hogan creates a novel of complex racial dynamics. By the closing pages, her “world turned upside down” is being righted, and resources are being redistributed, as the “true” Grayclouds and Red Hawk escape to a better world. The two whites witnessing the scene, Dr. Levee and Floyd, become invisible, mentioned only briefly on the second-to-the-last page, then heard of no more. Floyd’s last words, ““He’s out!”” (Hogan 174), reassure Belle that the dog is safe. The intent of Floyd’s words, to get the family out of the house before it explodes, is commendable, yet the words are a lie, albeit a “white” one. Dr. Levee’s final words are a question to Red Hawk: ““Where are you going?”” (374). Although these whites have blended into an “Other” race, their fate, affected by historical, persistent white lies, becomes a question. The small group of Indian characters move into the night, looking back only once to see “it all rising up in the reddened sky, the house, the barn, the broken string of lights, the life they had lived, nothing more than a distant burning” (275). Hogan’s ambiguous ending, at least concerning all of the other characters, suggests *an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines*” (Omi and Winant 56). The dominance of whites has been “turned upside down,” and it is the Indians who escape “to places where no road had been cut before them” (Hogan 375). The racial lines are redrawn,

and a new history begins. Catherine Rainwater's claim that "history is not a fixed set of facts" (46) can be applied to race, which is not fixed but always under construction.

Novels of three prominent American Indian authors, Michael Dorris, Louise Erdrich, and N. Scott Momaday, also provide innovative portrayals of white characters, all of whom transcend racial polarities. In *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, Dorris's compassionate and generous characters Sky and Evelyn certainly shatter the stereotypes of white racists. In Erdrich's *The Master Butchers Singing Club*, Tante, the stereotypical, self-centered, hypocritical white is juxtaposed with Delphine, the complex white protagonist, to reveal startling differences. Two more intriguing, white characters of Erdrich, John James Mauser and Polly Elizabeth, reveal possibilities of radical change as they interact with each other and with Fleur Pillager in *Four Souls*. Momaday's Angela St. John takes on the role of hybrid healer, at least, according to some critics, in *House Made of Dawn*. Finally, embodying the ultimate in whiteness, although Indian, Momaday's albino and Erdrich's Awun, "the Mist," present extremes in this exploration of white characters.

The racially mixed Rayona, born of an Indian mother and Black father, seeks a sense of home in Dorris's *Yellow Raft* and finds it only with Sky and Evelyn. After having been abandoned by her father and mother and molested by Father Tom, Rayona flees to Bearpaw Lake State Park. There she meets Sky, a draft dodger from the Vietnam War era, who offers her coffee, conversation, and a possible job with his wife Evelyn. The kind white couple accepts her and takes her in, asking no questions. They provide her with free room and board in their trailer, which Evelyn says " 'ain't nothing fancy'" (83). Rayona feels at home there and describes the living room, which "seems somewhat familiar. In front of the big woodgrain TV is a lopsided

green plain couch, scarred with cigarette burns. . . . Against the side wall, copies of *Grit*, *The National Enquirer*, and *The Star* are tossed in a pile on a table littered with half-filled blue enamel coffee mugs, an overflowing ashtray, and an opened bottle of Heinz ketchup (83). The trailer is certainly not the stereotypical “white” home, and Sky and Evelyn are not whites of wealth and privilege. However, they see a need and meet it, sharing their own meager possessions with Rayona, demanding nothing in return. In contrast, the wealthy DeMarcos, whose daughter Ellen is idolized by Rayona, brandish a photo of their Indian foster child upon meeting Rayona: “ ‘He lives on an Indian reservation there [in Arizona] and we discovered him through Save the Children. . . . When he writes to us now he calls us Mother and Pops just like one of our own kids’ ” (101). Rocky, the foster child, however, is not at all like one of the DeMarcos’ kids, who drives a flashy red car and goes to a fancy private school. The DeMarcos make a show of their philanthropy, which costs them little compared to their income, as opposed to Sky and Evelyn. All whites are not wealthy, nor are they all self-centered hypocrites, as Dorris portrays.

Also refusing simplistic stereotypes is Louise Erdrich, former wife of Dorris and collaborator in writing. Written after their divorce and his suicide, Erdrich’s off-rez novel, *The Master Butchers Singing Club*, is populated with a myriad of richly developed white characters. From Delphine, the motherless protagonist who lives with Cyprian, the mixedblood, bisexual, acrobatic Ojibwe, through Eva, Delphine’s close friend who dies with cancer, to Fidelis, the master butcher who sings like the angels, the novel’s panorama of white characters captivate readers. Most of them are not wealthy, thus, not conforming to the stereotype of rich whites, nor are they simplistically portrayed. In fact, Fidelis and Eva’s butcher “shop and the dead animals



fed a complex range of beings” (84). The narrator describes the customers of this Argus butcher shop: “Some paid money and some. . . did not pay at all like Step-and-a-Half, Simpy Benson, the Shimeks, and the out-of-work fathers who had taken to Depression roads” (84). Many of the characters, first- or second-generation European immigrants, must work hard to survive and cope with hunger, bitter North Dakota winters, and tragic deaths. Yet, the music made by men of the town, singing in the master butcher’s slaughterhouse, which has “the sacred acoustics of a cathedral” (106), alleviate some of the sadness.

The only white stereotypes allowed by Erdrich are Sheriff Hock, as noted above, and Tante, the sister of Fidelis, who is bitterly and humorously portrayed. Hypocritical, egocentric, and hate-filled, Tante takes tremendous stock in appearances. She and her “host of pious Lutheran ladies. . . [would] come around every few afternoons to try to do their business on a Catholic” (122)—Eva, her sister-in-law, who is dying of cancer. Tante even pours out the morphine so important for Eva’s pain because of the talk: ““They are saying that she is addicted. This cannot be. The wife of my brother? It is a shame on us”” (128). Later, Tante, seeking status and money, sells a cameo to buy a white suit “welded from some fabric of an unusual metallic sheen and stiffness. . . cut and soldered together much like an armor” (180). The suit is so strong that when Tante is struck by a car, “[t]he suit wasn’t even dusty, but when smoothed gave off the same luster as before” (181). Tante’s superficiality crystallizes into armor, and her white, metallic “suit carried itself around her like a shield” (235), embodying her mask and hardened heart. It is not until she is humiliated yet intrigued by the prospect of working for Step-and-a-Half, that her armor is pierced, and that, only because of the sewing machine that she will learn to work. The potential of transforming Step-and-a-Half’s scraps into Tante’s own creations,

enthalls her, and Tante's "need for work smacked up against her pride" (237). Portrayed as self-righteous, prideful, and privileged, Tante, the epitome of whiteness, is brought down.

Delphine, neither a stereotypical nor a hypocritical white, knows she cannot pray to God when she has no faith, unlike Tante with her Lutheran women. Delphine disdains Tante's hypocrisy and cruelty, and even imagines herself as seen through Tante's eyes:

*Who are you, Delphine Watzka, you drunkard's child and fairy's whore, you vagabond, you motherless creature with a belly of steel and a lusting heart? Who are you, what are you, born a dirty Pole in a Polack's dirt? . . . Who are you and what makes you think you belong anywhere near this house, this shop, and especially my brother, Fidelis, who is the master of all he does? (85-86)*

Although her past does not measure up to Tante's superficial standards, Delphine does not change her present merely to appease Tante. She acts from the heart, according to compassion for others and a deep desire to serve wherever needed. Although at one point, right before the death of her father, Delphine lapses into a self-pitying fantasy, she realizes the ridiculousness of her thoughts. Imagining accusations of Ruthie Shavers, the girl found dead in the cellar, Delphine "hears":

You are alone. . . . Your husband's from a foreign country and you haven't got a child. Your father's dying and you don't know the face of your mother. You are different from everyone else living in the town. You think you're smarter. . . [but the] truth is you just feel sorrier for yourself. Poor Delphine. Poor girl Polack. Poor butcher's wife! (329)

At this, Delphine laughs and laughs; both portrayals of herself through others' eyes are inaccurate, and she accepts herself for who she is: loving wife to Fidelis, nurturing step-mother to her best friend Eva's children, and daughter of Roy Watzka, an alcoholic who tells stories like an Indian. One of Roy's embellished stories concerns Delphine's mother, whose identity is not divulged until the last chapter, and then, only to the readers. It was Mrs. Shimek who birthed Delphine in an outhouse, then abandoned her. The baby's cries were heard by Step-and-a-Half, a survivor of the Ghost Dance who was destined to walk, "the only way to outdistance all that she remembered and did not remember" (285). In her walking and searching for scraps, she rescued this baby and took her to Roy. A most precious "scrap," Delphine grows and thrives "in a world where butchers sing like angels" (388). Erdrich has created a "complex figure of difference and identity" in Delphine, whose interactions with Indians Cyprian and Step-and-a-Half "initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 1-2).

Another such "innovative site" is found in Erdrich's *Four Souls*, the sequel to *Tracks*. The novel opens as Fleur Pillager walks to Minneapolis, following the (white) tracks of John James Mauser, "who had stolen her trees" (2) to build his mansion. Obsessed with revenge, Fleur is hired by Polly Elizabeth, Mauser's sister-in-law, as laundress for the household. She gradually works her way into Mauser's room, becoming the one who heals him from his "condition," caused by "a damming of the sperm" (39). She does not heal him for his benefit, however, but for hers. Seeing his suffering, "she felt cheated of her revenge. She wanted the man healthy so that she could destroy him fresh" (24).

Portrayed as a typical wealthy, powerful, privileged white, Mauser at first seems worthy of such destruction. His knowledge of Fleur's language surprises her, but not Nanapush, who narrates parts of this tale. The trickster recalls Mauser's past:

I could have told her [Fleur] how he took advantage of one loophole and then another. How in his earliest days, handsome and clever, he had married young Ojibwe girls straight out of boarding school, applied for their permits to log off the allotment lands they had inherited. Once their trees were gone he had abandoned his young wives, one after the next. (23)

Entranced by this particular Ojibwe woman, Mauser regains his health, has his marriage with Placide annulled, and marries Fleur. His story is told by Polly Elizabeth, who returns often to the Mauser mansion after having been banished with her sister Placide. Polly is first eager for only gossip about Fleur and is horrified that Mauser, "a man who had so wonderfully stripped and profited from his holdings here on earth could so easily become that woman's dupe" (59). Gradually, however, she ingratiates herself back into the household and even becomes friends with Fleur and confidante of Mauser. After the birth of their son, who suffers from severe mental problems, Polly notes the changes that Mauser manifests, as he grows more thoughtful and returns to Catholicism. Polly believes that she is the only one who notices his daily attendance at Mass and his "score of confessions every month" (90). He even confesses to Polly: "You were always aware, I think. . . of how I wanted a son. It was a dear wish of mine—it still is. . . . I feel that I am responsible for this one's . . . abnormalities . . . his strangeness. I have come to believe that the boy's backward traits are a judgment on the man I was" (90). Polly, amazed at his openness, realizes for the first time, "some human quality, a streak of humility"

(90). From that time on, Mauser's business ventures begin to fail, one by one, and he loses his money. Polly notices that he wears "an increasingly haunted look, though maybe *hunted* is the better word" (92).

As Polly Elizabeth becomes privy to Mauser's concerns, she learns "that Fleur knew that Mauser had wronged and stolen and gained his fabulous position in the first place by obtaining false holdings in northern Minnesota" (126). Mauser admits to Polly, "I'm just one of an army of swindlers and scavengers. . . . She [Fleur] has let me know full well the misery I left behind. She has told me that she expects I'll sell this house, that I'll give her the automobile she covets, and our son" (126-27). He knows that Fleur had hated him and come for revenge. However, he also knows her inherent propensity for alcohol: "There is no helping her, don't you see? The stuff is poison to them. It's their downfall. They'd have beaten us back and kept their lands if it wasn't for the liquor. They can't help it. One taste, one teaspoon of it, and they're utterly doomed" (128). Mauser, though somewhat humbled and changed because of Fleur, retains his prideful, prejudiced views concerning her people and their folly: "The reservations are ruined spots and may as well be sold off and all trace of their former owners obliterated. That's my theory. Let the Indians drift into the towns and cities or subsist where they will. Thinking their tribes will ever be restored is sheer foolishness. There's nothing left!" (127). Here, Erdrich voices, through a white character/narrator, a white man's thoughts concerning Indians. However, they are inaccurate, and it is Fleur who returns and regains her land, while Mauser flees and is doomed "to wander the earth" (159).

Polly Elizabeth, however, becomes a white character with a "difference," shedding her initial shallow, smug, busybody self. Her story begins with her disdain for Fleur, her

dependence on Mauser for financial support, and her acquiescence to Placide to be used as a model for painting. However, Polly Elizabeth begins to see others as humans with frailties and needs, she herself becomes more human. She even ponders the pain and injustice involved in the building of Mauser's mansion: "At the time, though I had sympathized in and even acted in protest at the treatment of the horses that dragged its great blocks of stone uphill, it had not occurred to me that humans were ill treated in the matter too. All of the materials, the fabric, all the raw stuff of our opulent shelter were taken from Fleur's people" (67). Feeling compassion for these people in general and Fleur in particular, Polly Elizabeth devotes all her energies to helping Fleur with her difficult pregnancy and listening to her "raving melancholy" until a bond is created: "Piece by piece, over the weeks and months, there then grew . . . between us a connection. And from that connection, I am not ashamed to say it, there grew love" (68). Polly Elizabeth, whose yearning for a child remains unfulfilled, put all of her heart into helping Fleur through her difficult pregnancy. However, it is Polly Elizabeth who makes possible Fleur's alcohol dependency, begun for medicinal purposes only, a problem which almost kills Fleur by the end of the novel. Fleur manages a safe delivery of her son, and after the baby's birth, Polly claims, "These were the happiest and the most requited times of my existence" (69).

Another change in Polly Elizabeth occurs when she hears Mauser's tale of his mute manservant, Fantan, who had saved Mauser's life. During the war, Fantan took a bullet for Mauser, and his tongue was sliced by an exploding sardine can. She suddenly sees Fantan as a human with feelings: "I had never seen him as a man or even known he was intelligent . . . . The two [Fantan and Mauser] had laughed behind my back at my dismissal, at my prudery, and my sorry treatment of the man was suddenly a feature of livid shame. I believe I went and caught

my breath in and wished to cry” (97). At that point, Polly Elizabeth’s change is most evident, as she admits: “So you see, once a person drops the scales of prejudiced certainty and doubts appear, there is no telling how far a heart can open” (98). She eventually marries Fantan, and they plan to open up a store on Fleur’s reservation, where Polly can be near to those she loves. Her last words in the novel proclaim this love: “I have married one servant and declared another my sister. My husband and I do not speak in flows of words, but we connect by the heartstrings and by laughter and by signs. I am that rare thing thought only to exist in death. I am a happy woman” (161).

One more white woman who changes and becomes a white with a “difference” is the beautiful Angela Grace St. John, in N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*. First seen by Father Olguin as she enters the chapel, Angela later tells the priest that she seeks the healing mineral waters of Los Ojos, where she is staying. Although she states that it is her back that is sore, we learn that she is pregnant, that she has traveled here leaving her doctor-husband in Los Angeles, and that her healing is more than physical. As Louis Owens notes, “Angela’s physical and spiritual selves are alienated from one another; to be healed she must be restored to wholeness, a restoration Abel will be able to effect” (105-06). Owens also notes that Angela needs restoration of vision, and he compares Angela with Momaday’s “other latecoming things” to the land, which “have an alien and inferior aspect, a poverty of vision and instinct, by which they are estranged from the wild land” (106). Thus, the place named “Los Ojos” becomes ideal for such restoration of Angela’s “poverty of vision.”

Various images of sight that pervade the novel can be attributed to Angela’s sharpening of vision. Upon first encountering Father Olguin, she notes: ““The sky is so blue. It was like

water, very still and deep, when I drove through the canyon a while ago” (Momaday, *House* 30). This image is somewhat vague, but later, when Abel arrives to chop wood for her, Angela’s vision is more precise: “[s]he had never seen a man put his back to his work before” (33). As she gazes at Abel, seeing him vividly, not only can she see every muscle and motion, but she also becomes “aware of some useless agony that was spent upon the wood, some hurt she could not have imagined until now” (33). At one point, she even catches her breath, saying “I see” (33). However, she does not yet see fully; she recalls the corn dancers who “were intent upon something that she could not see. Their eyes were held upon some vision out of range, something away in the end of distance, some reality that she did not know” (37-38). Reflecting on this memory, Angela longs “[t]o see beyond the landscape, beyond every shape and shadow and color, that was to see nothing. That was to be free and finished, complete, spiritual” (38).

Not yet achieving this vision, Angela immerses herself in the surrounding tribal customs as well as in Abel, whom she takes as a lover. After the Feast of Santiago, as Angela returns to the Benavides house, her temporary abode, her senses are sharpened. Owens notes that “Angela watches, using her eyes to absorb and comprehend Abel’s world” (106). Moreover, as she associates Abel with her memory of a “badger or a bear” (Momaday, *House* 34), she becomes “a white woman who is learning to ‘see,’ for badger and bear are considered by the people of Jemez to be . . . powerful healers” (Owens 106). Not only does Owens assert Angela’s own restoration to wholeness, but also her role in Abel’s own healing. Citing Angela’s visitation of Abel at the hospital and her recounting her own bear story, Owens claims, “Angela’s story indicates that she has truly learned to ‘see’ beyond. . . . [a]nd by bringing . . . the powerful healing presence of Bear associated with Abel, Angela has joined with Benally in working to cure Abel” (115-16).



Owens sees Angela's own ability to break out of her limited Eurocentric perspective to incorporate a holistic vision, revealing "a fertile syncretism" attained through a difficult "process always demanded of those on the periphery and seldom accomplished by those from the privileged center" (116).

Also referring to Angela's bear story told to Abel, Susan Scarberry-Garcia, in *Landmarks of Healing*, notes that Angela "has imagined herself into the story, thereby symbolically connecting herself to Abel and Peter [her son] and to native tradition" (52). Although stating that Angela's association of Abel with the bear and badger is not necessarily a conscious one, Scarberry-Garcia notes that "[i]n creating a character such as Angela who seems to intuitively sense the patterning of Jemez knowledge of animal kinship and storytelling, Momaday has imagined an astute Anglo woman who to some degree transcends her own cultural background" (54-55). However, Scarberry-Garcia does not touch upon Angela's journey from blindness to sight, as does Louis Owens, yet she discusses the image of blindness. In examining the many layers of sickness and healing, Scarberry-Garcia cites the following from the first page of Momaday's *The Names*, in which he states that the Kiowas "were stricken, surely, nearly blind in the keep of some primordial darkness. And yet it was their time, and they came out into the light" (108-09). From the Kiowas' story of their emergence "into the light," Scarberry-Garcia notes this pattern: "being stricken blind or paralyzed, emerging, acquiring vision, knowledge, and identity" (109). She then applies this acquiring of vision to both Abel and Tosameh in *House Made of Dawn* (109-10), but not to Angela. Certainly, the fact that Angela is white, to whom this Kiowa emergence pattern would not necessarily apply, could explain Scarberry-Garcia's omission; however, she at least implies this possibility: "Momaday presents a web of

symbolic associations between humans and the natural world that shows that subconsciously even a cultural outsider like Angela can be partially incorporated into Jemez reality, so powerful is that world view” (54). Thus, Angela Grace St. John becomes a white woman with a difference, achieved through her own seeking of vision as well as the power of the Jemez world view as revealed by Momaday.

Not all critics, however, are so quick to assess the character Angela so favorably; to some, her “whiteness” cannot be overcome. Kenneth Lincoln claims that Angela is empty and shallow, “an angel of condescending grace, bearing white woman’s burden, an unborn child” (119). Furthermore, Lincoln sees her as a “more insidious threat” (119) than the albino, whose malevolent role in the novel will be discussed shortly. Portrayed as “a Beverly Hills matron who . . . goes slumming religion and race to pursue ‘the last reality’ beyond all things seen and known” (119), Lincoln sees no value at all in this white woman, who certainly has no positive effect on Abel. Echoing this sentiment, Larry Evers claims that Angela “will become an obstacle in Abel’s re-emergence journey” (117). Furthermore, Evers sees Angela’s bear story told when she visits Abel in the hospital “as rootless as a Disney cartoon” (127). Her story is skeletal, not at all like the one recalled by Benally, and Evers notes that “Abel seems to realize this, if Benally does not, for he does not respond to Angela. . . . [and] Abel refuses to play Angela’s game a second time” (127). These critics see no suggestion that Angela could aspire to be anything other than a white, condescending woman, playing games with Abel. The complexity of her character reveals, however, that she is a white with a difference.

Two of the most compelling and enigmatic portrayals of white characters in twentieth-century American Indian literature are the albino in Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and

Fleur's son Awun ("The Mist") in Erdrich's *Four Souls*. Ironically, both of these "whitest of the white" characters are Indian, or, at least mixed-bloods. The albino, whose birth is noted in Fray Nicolás's journals as the son Manuelita and Diego Fragua, and Awun, although unnamed in *Four Souls*, is the son of John James Mauser and Fleur Pillager. In both of these characters, aspects of whiteness can be found, even though their whiteness is only skin-deep. Or is it?

In *House Made of Dawn*, the birth of the albino is detailed in Father Olguin's reading of Fray Nicolás's journals. The entry dated January 5, 1875, provides this information:

I heard today of a strange thing here on the 3d & so went to see a child born to Manuelita & Diego Fragua. It is what is called an albino whiter than any child I have seen before tho' it had been of the white race. It is dead & raw about its eyes & mouth tho' otherways hale I think & there is a meager white hair on its head like an old man & its crying is very little to hear. (49)

This description paints a vivid portrait of such a white Indian, as well as the strangeness of such an anomaly. However, as Floyd Watkins notes, Jemez Pueblo has a high rate of albinism: "At almost any given time several albinos live in this little village, which has never been as large as two thousand people" (141). Thus, perhaps it is not surprising that Momaday would conceive of such a character. When viewed in light of a quote from a 1964 essay by Momaday published in *Ramparts*, the rationale for such a choice becomes even clearer:

The Indian has been for a long time generalized in the imagination of the white man. Denied the acknowledgment of individuality and change, he has been made to become in theory what he could not become in fact, a synthesis of himself. . . .

None but an Indian knows so well what it is like to have incomplete existence in two worlds and security in neither. (qtd. in Lincoln n268-69)

In the body of the albino, Juan Reyes, Momaday has fabricated a synthesis of an Indian and a white man, perhaps to prevent the Indian's being "generalized in the imagination of the white man." Such a synthesis is fraught with complexities, as can be expected.

The first appearance of the albino occurs while Francisco is hoeing in his cornfield. Hearing a whisper and "an excitement of breathing," the old man is "suddenly conscious of some alien presence close at hand" (63). He peers into the darkness, seeing nothing, yet sensing a presence of evil, he feels no fear, only "a dull, intrinsic sadness, a vague desire to weep, for evil had long since found him out and knew who he was" (64). The narrator closes the chapter with a description of this evil, embodied in the albino who resumes his breathing as he watches Francisco: "Above the open mouth, the nearly sightless eyes followed the old man out of the cornfield, and the barren lids fluttered helpless behind the colored glass" (63). The coupling of the albino with evil becomes a motif in the novel.

The next appearance of the albino occurs at the feast of Santiago, in which a group of men and boys on horseback attempt to catch a white rooster, which was to be sacrificed to insure that "agricultural and animal life for the village are renewed for another cycle" (Scarberry-Garcia 41). Angela is looking on at both Abel and the albino. The latter is described as "large, lithe, and white-skinned" (Momaday, *House* 42). He is the only one able to retrieve the rooster from the hole, and when he looks at Angela, she sees "that under his hat the pale yellow hair was thin and cut close to the scalp; the tight skin of the head was visible and pale and pink. The face was huge and mottled white and pink, and the thick, open lips were blue and violet" (44). Appearing

to her as “huge and hideous” (44), he flails Abel with the white rooster “with only the mute malice of the act itself, careless, undetermined, almost composed in some final, preeminent sense” (44). He continues to swing the rooster about even after it is dead, so that “the neck of the bird was broken and the flesh open and the blood splashed everywhere about” (44-45). Although Scarberry-Garcia states that this action is “apparently an appropriate act for the victor” (41), it seems to be excessively violent. It is almost as if the victor, white himself with the white sacrificial rooster, is exercising his power and superiority over Abel, his fellow Pueblo, but with darker skin.

Seven days after the feast and sacrifice, Abel and the albino are seen talking low in a bar: “Now and then the white man laughed, and each time it carried too high on the scale and ended in a strange, inhuman cry—as of pain. It was an old woman’s laugh, thin and weak as water. It issued only from the tongue and teeth of the great evil mouth, and it fell away from the blue lips and there was nothing left of it” (Momaday, *House* 77). The two men leave, and in the darkness and rain, and Abel plunging his knife into the repulsive albino, hears “the strange excitement with the white man’s breath, and the quick, uneven blowing at his ear” (78). Abel also feels “even the scales of the lips and the hot slippery point of the tongue, writhing” and is “sick with terror and revulsion” (78). The final movement of the albino is to embrace Abel and hold him close, as “[t]he white immensity of flesh lay over and smothered him” (78). When Abel is finally freed from this terrible embrace, the great body of the albino seems “to wither and grow old” (78). Yet, in the next sentence, the great body of the albino seems “to cast off its age and weight. . . and [to sink] slowly to the ground, as if the bones were dissolving within it. And Abel was no longer terrified, but strangely cautious and intent full of wonder and regard” (78). It

is this description of the albino's serpent-like tongue and his transformation at death that prompts Louis Owens to claim that the albino "is meant to be identified with the serpent and evil" (101). Moreover, witchcraft must in involved "in the transformation of the youthful 'white man' into the seventy-year-old he must be were he born in 1875 as Father Nicholas's journal indicates" (101).

The supernatural qualities of the albino are reinforced by Father Olguin, as he testifies at Abel's trial for the murder. The priest states that in Abel's "mind it was not a man he killed. It was something else" (94). When asked if that "something else" was an evil spirit, Father Olguin responds, "Something like that, yes" (94). However, to Abel, the act was not at all complicated or supernatural. In fact, he sees it as "simple" and "the most natural thing in the world" (95). He reflects, "They must know that he would kill the white man again, if he had the chance, that there could be no hesitation whatsoever. For he would know what the white man was, and he would kill him if he could. A man kills such an enemy if he can" (95). Although "what the white man was" may be evident to Abel, it is not to all readers or critics, a point noted by Owens: "The albino has intrigued critics of *House Made of Dawn* perhaps more than any other single aspect of the novel" (101). Is it this particular white man, the albino, who is so disgusting to Abel? Is it "the white man" as representative of all white men? Is it the evil or witchery that this white man embodies? What makes this white man "such an enemy" that any man would want to kill him?

If it is merely the fact that this white man is an albino, Melville's exploration of this phenomenon in his chapter of *Moby-Dick*, "The Whiteness of the Whale," could apply:

What is it that in the Albino man so peculiarly repels and often shocks the eye, as that sometimes he is loathed by his own kith and kin! It is that whiteness which

invests him, a thing expressed by the name he bears. The Albino is as well made as other men—has no substantive deformity—and yet this mere aspect of all-pervading whiteness makes him more strangely hideous than the ugliest abortion. Why should this be so? (189)

Seen through Angela's eyes, the albino appears as "huge and hideous," and the descriptions of Juan Reyes are certainly repelling and shocking. In addition, he seems to be "loathed by his own kith and kin," all of whom are Indians, whose skin pigmentation would serve to exaggerate their difference.

If this white man represents "the white man," Abel's urge to kill him would be too simplistic, as Owens suggests. This reading is reinforced yet also extended by Momaday's own words. Owen quotes from a letter to Harper & Row's editor, included in Schubnell's *N. Scott Momaday*: "He [the albino] is a white man, or rather 'white man' in quotes, in appearance, but in fact is neither white nor a man in the usual sense of those words. He is an embodiment of evil like Moby Dick, an intelligent malignity" (qtd. in Owens 102). Here, not only is the albino whiteness personified, but also evil, and Momaday himself refers to the white whale, which Melville probes in minute detail, calling into question whiteness itself. Other critics have added their own twist to this evil white man. Scarberry-Garcia states, "Clearly, the albino is associated with evil" (42), while H. S. McAllister details more specifically this evil. Owens provides this explanation "that the albino is possessed by the witch, Nicolás *teah-wha*. The witch, the old priest Nicolás, and the albino are, says McAllister, 'in a complex, magical way, three manifestations of a single person'" (qtd. in Owens 101). With these associations of the albino to "the white man" and to evil itself, one can see that such a being would merit murdering.

However, critics have also speculated on the meaning of this murder. Owens also notes that “Matthias Schubnell has suggested that ‘the killing of the albino is a symbolic representation of the cultural conflict which Abel is trying to resolve’” (qtd. in Owens 101). Thus, the albino, a Jemez Indian clothed in white skin embodies the tensions of the two conflicting cultures, and certainly, Abel and other Indian protagonists face similar underlying conflicts. The difference here is that Abel attempts to take matters in his own hands and kill outright this evil, white/Indian force. Kenneth Lincoln provides a reason for the need for this murder: “Genetically mutant and homosexually disturbing, this stereotype of the white oppressor in the Indian must be killed” (119). To expand on this idea, Larry Evers suggests that the albino is not only “the White Man in the Indian; perhaps even the White Man in Abel himself. When Abel kills the albino, in a real sense he kills a part of himself and his culture which he can no longer recognize and control” (123). This killing is seen by some critics as upsetting the balance of good and evil; therefore, Abel must pay the consequences for his crime. In addition, the fact that Abel’s act is committed by him, individually, rather than with communal approval and aid is noted by Catherine Rainwater: “[H]e egoistically confronts evil alone instead of merely playing his role in the overall, communal managements of it. In this and other acts, Abel violates a sacred pattern by inappropriately assuming individual responsibility” (74). Abel’s act, although achieving a temporary solution, at least for him, does not have lasting effects on the cosmic battle of good versus evil or the cultural battle of Indian versus white.

One more character in the literature provides an equally intriguing blend of Indian (Anishinaabe) and white—the son of Fleur Pillager and John James Mauser in Louise Erdrich’s *Four Souls*. In her plunge into the white world, prompted by her own obsession for revenge,



Fleur bears a son who is hauntingly white. It is as though her life amidst wealthy whites is subsumed within her own body, and her son with blue eyes and flax-colored hair bears no traces of the Pillager blood. The baby is described as “soft as butter” and “astonishingly like his father in coloration” (69). As he grows, doted on by both Fleur and Polly Elizabeth, his demands for his own way in every situation also grow. Polly notes, “The boy refused to wean himself and wouldn’t be coaxed onto a bottle or even a cup. . . . But when allowed the breast, he closed his eyes, clung to her with sweet trust, and was the picture of such relieved desperation that I could not imagine refusing him myself” (85). As his desire for sweets also grows, so does he: “He started out thin and puling, but soon grew rolls and puckers, anklets and bracelets of silken fat” (69). He doesn’t speak, but for him, there is no need; every whim is indulged. Yet, at times, he would rock back and forth, “his fist in his mouth. He stared at nothing then. . . . Even Fleur couldn’t pull him from his trance, not that she tried. . . . she would encourage his vacancies” (120). Doctors insist that he is normal, but Polly Elizabeth knows better, and her fears are reinforced as she notes his actions on a particular day:

But on that day, as we played sweetly together on the lion-shaped rug that his mother had bought, he suddenly went absent. He crouched beside me, very still, staring out the window into the empty sky. His blue eyes were just as vacant. . . . For one hour, he sat there. . . . His mouth fell open. His features coarsened into caricature. He was the very picture of idiocy. . . . and then he began to babble. Those sounds, those syllables, those pathetic attempts. They were frightful, then, never mind the hideous they would become. (88)

This son displays characteristics of a mental disorder, and his extraordinary aptitude with numbers bears this out. Fleur teaches him to play cards, and he becomes a genius at it, winning at poker as adeptly as his mother.

This mental condition, however, remains unnamed, as does Fleur's son, an anathema noted by Margaret Kashpaw when Fleur returns to the reservation: "She came back so rich that we didn't know, at first, whether the slim woman in the white car, and the whiter suit fitted to the lean contours of her body, was the ghost of the girl we knew or Fleur herself" (182). Then, Margaret notices "the pale blur of a face in the window of the car, and he stepped out, too, shaking his fat legs, frowning. . . . He seemed too soft, too baby fine, too chubby, too white, to be any son of Fleur Pillager's" (183). The preponderance of "white" images reveals the depths of Fleur's downfall. This white son is, however, truly Fleur's, and although his skin pigmentation does not evince his Pillager roots, his skill at gambling does. Once Fleur discovers that the Indian agent Tatro is the true owner of her land, she engages him in a card game with the highest stakes—the deed to her land. Drinking heavily and feigning an inability to carry on, she hands her cards to her son. This "white" Indian comes to life, as his "hands swooped out from his sleeves like starved birds and the cards flew and gathered and divided themselves with a grace that made Tatro gasp" (197). Nanapush narrates the scene, concluding with the climactic coup of the boy's winning back the land from the duped white agent. Commenting on Tatro's being "taken," Nanapush wonders "when he [Tatro] realized that the foolish mask the boy wore was in fact both his real face and unreadable" (197). Fleur's son may wear a white "mask," but he is still a Pillager.

After the Fleur's victory, she, Margaret, and Nanapush sit "together talking . . . and replaying the game, the foolish and foolhardiness of Tatro, the bitter twist of his luck, the surprised malice in his face" (199). However, Margaret, who knows Fleur as "the daughter of my spirit" (184), sees that Fleur's drinking has taken its toll and that her eyes are "anxious with sorrow" as she calls out, "'My son,'" (200). Suddenly, Margaret discerns Fleur's shame and despair when she realizes that Fleur has neglected to name her son's spirit. Names, like words, "are intrinsically powerful" (Momaday, "Native" 7). To the Anishnaabeg, as well as to many tribes, the act of naming plays a major role in a person's identity and character. As Margaret perceives, Fleur's failure to give her son a spirit name has caused him to be "'strange in the head because the spirits don't know him'" (Erdrich, *Four Souls* 200). Therefore, Margaret initiates a powerful, physical and spiritual healing regimen for Fleur, which culminates the action of the novel; the son, however, does not reappear until a later novel, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*.

Here, Fleur's son, now a young man, has acquired a name: "Since Fleur would not say it and nobody dared ask the boy with the dead eyes himself, he was named by invisible consensus. Awun, he was called, the Mist, for he was silent as mist and set apart from others, always, by his impenetrable Pillager ways" (277). His character is associated with vagueness, invisibility, and even death ("with the dead eyes"), all of which manifest Dyer's concept of whiteness. In addition to his claims concerning the non-color/invisibility of whites, Dyer suggests that whites have always been fascinated with death. For example, in white marble statues of the Pieta, "the dead white body has often been a sight of veneration and, object of beauty" (208), while, on the other hand, "ghastly white" zombies and vampires also captivate white audiences (210). Awun

embodies such enigmatic whiteness and is viewed as “either very simple or so deep and devious that his mask could not be penetrated” (Erdrich, *Last Report* 277). Moreover, his physicality is portrayed as aberrant, and as “he bulked out and thickened” (277), he becomes useful for his adeptness at splitting wood, a task that leads him to Mary Kashpaw, the faithful servant of Father Damien. Sister Dymrna asks Awun to “haul wood from the Kashpaw family’s lot for Mary Kashpaw to cut” (278). He does, and there, meets Mary, whose wood-splitting skills match his own. Enamored with her, Awun hides in her cabin, and in the middle of the night, harnesses himself to her old wooden sleigh and pulls her across “the river of grass,” as powerfully “as a draft horse” (280-81). When she awakes, Mary relives the traumatic time of her past when she, her father, and her mother were pulled violently in their wagon by their spooked horses.

Although her father was unable to cut the heavy ropes, Mary can and does, with her sharpened ax at her side, an action which sets her free. Torn between staying with her beloved priest and following Awun, Mary chooses the latter, and soon they begin “work on a tiny baby boy” (282), the future Jack Mauser. Awun becomes a literal vehicle for Mary’s healing, at least temporarily, for “ten years later, brain shocked and bearing the nerve deadness of confinement, she came walking back from the disastrous marriage with empty arms to care, as she always had, for Father Damien” (282). Again, as in *Four Souls*, Awun disappears, his invisibility restored.

The white, mixed-blood Pillager/Mauser, “The Mist,” embodies an enigma, as does Momaday’s albino. The purpose of their presence in the midst of their tribes provides numerous possibilities for interpretation. Both men, hideously white, are described as physically huge, and both act violently toward their objects of attention. Dyer, associating whiteness with Christianity, the embodiment of spirit, notes that “Christianity is very concrete, physical, and

body-minded” (16). Furthermore, the albino’s and Awun’s violence could spring from their “white spirit [which] organises white flesh and in turn non-white flesh and other material matters” (15). Both Indian “whites” act out their sense of control over “non-white flesh” in exerting physical power over their “prey.” Finally, as Dyer claims, “The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world” (2). With these two characters, whiteness is foregrounded, but with the purpose of caricaturing it. Made blindingly visible, whiteness becomes so blatant that we cannot fail to see it. Perhaps, by employing such a shock of bright white, Momaday and Erdrich seek to put whiteness “in its place and end its rule” (Dyer 4).

Through their kaleidoscopic portrayals of white characters, all of these twentieth-century American Indian writers have certainly gained what Homi Bhabha terms “the ‘right to signify’ from the periphery of authorized power and privilege” (2). Whether seeking to “end the rule” of whiteness or merely to display their own “social articulation of difference” (2) as they continuously interact with whites, these writers succeed in their purposes. Whites are fairly, honestly, and creatively shown in the fiction of a people who have every right to portray whiteness without a difference, but with a perpetual sameness. Instead, however, these Native writers have removed whites (and Indians) from “the fixed tablet of tradition,” enacting the “complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (2). Through their literature, both fiction and nonfiction, American Indian writers have inscribed such moments.

## CHAPTER 4

### WHITENESS WITH A DIFFERENCE: FALSE AND FAITHFUL “SAINTS”

In *Savagism and Civilization*, Roy H. Pearce traces the evolution of thought concerning America’s first inhabitants by the colonizers, from contact through the 1850s. A major concern of Western European settlers, that of civilizing the Natives, became conjoined with Christianizing them: “The practical problem of bringing savages to civilization was to be solved by bringing them to Christianity which was at its heart” (6). This colonialist merging of civilizing with Christianizing is also noted by George E. Tinker (Osage) in his writings on missionaries to the American Indians. He sees missionization as “the foundation for one of the primary European conquest strategies” (381). Another strategy, that of defeating the Indians militarily, was considered too brutal by some colonialists, who preferred instead, “the gentler conquest of conversion” (381).

The achievement of this “gentler” form of colonization varied greatly among tribes and was generally dependent upon geography. As each Western European nation staked its claim on its areas of “discovery” and exploration, the inhabiting tribes were inculcated with that nation’s form of Christianity. For example, soon after British colonizers arrived in the Northeast, they began preaching Protestantism, for the most part. In the Midwest and Northwest, French Jesuits introduced Catholicism to the Natives, as did the Spanish Franciscans in the Southwest. Understandably, numerous other “brands” of Christianity were disseminated to the Indians over time, so that generalizations according to tribes do not necessarily apply, especially today.

However, a strong Catholic presence remains among tribes situated in the Midwest, Northwest, and Southwest, particularly on reservations.

Documentation of early Protestant and Catholic endeavors in the New World can be found in Wilcomb E. Washburn's 1964 publication *The Indian and the White Man*. Here, Washburn has compiled over 100 texts evidencing Indian/governmental communications from 1492 to the middle of the twentieth century. In the introduction to his chapter on "The Missionary Impulse," Washburn notes that "the lack of success on the part of the English [in converting the Indians] was soon apparent" (161). Various letters and historical documents reveal certain doctrinal issues that were difficult for the Natives to grasp, as well as for them to see "Christian" actions manifested in many whites. The Indians' desires to see Christians "practice what they preach" were often not fulfilled. As for the effectiveness of Protestantism versus Catholicism, doctrine was often subordinated to the methods used by each group. Washburn, focusing on one branch of Protestantism prominent in the Northeast notes, "The Puritan method differed from the Catholic in that the ministers were primarily responsible to their own English congregations and could not go far afield" (185). Thus, one reason for the ineffectiveness of some of these early efforts of Protestants could be that they generally built churches and tried to get the Indians to come to them. In contrast, many Catholic missionaries went directly to the Indians and lived among them for years, especially the Jesuits, whose French presence in the Northwest and Midwest is salient.

For the Catholic missionaries from Spain, however, the establishment of missions became an important method of conversion of tribes of the Southwest. This method involved displacing tribes, locating "them in carefully controlled mission compounds," and immersing

“them in European values and social systems” (Tinker 381). Such mission compounds were joint efforts of Church and State; established by Franciscans and funded by Spain, “[t]he Spanish mission was a frontier institution that sought to incorporate indigenous people into the Spanish colonial empire, its Catholic religion, and certain aspects of Hispanic culture” (Wright). By exercising both religious and social control over the Natives, the missions facilitated Spanish settlement with the added benefit of military protection provided by the Spanish government. Although the mission system fell “out of favor as an important element of Spanish frontier strategy” (Wright), mission churches can still be found in Texas and California.

Certainly, the methods, doctrines, attitudes, and daily practices of missionaries have varied significantly, as have the results of their efforts. The attitude of bringing the Natives “into the fold” by Christianizing them engendered paternalism by these “shepherds,” reinforcing the prevailing concept of white, colonizing superiority. Some well-intentioned missionaries assumed that they knew what was best for their charges, “making decisions on behalf of Indian peoples and implementing them politically” (Tinker 381). Furthermore, because they were inextricably linked with European colonizers, Tinker claims that early missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, played significant roles “in the process of pacification that enabled, simplified, and enhanced the ultimate conquest of those tribes” (382). Even though such efforts were intended for the good of the Native peoples, Tinker notes their detrimental effects: “Thoroughly blinded by their immersion in their own culture and their implicit acceptance of the illusion of European superiority, these apostles of the church, and indeed virtually every missionary of every denomination, functioned in one or way or another as a participant in an unintended evil” (382). Some missionaries, however, adapted themselves and their doctrine to



the Natives, rather than stubbornly clinging to their beliefs and practices and attempting to eradicate all those opposed. Instead, they “learned to tolerate if not encourage certain group practices originally associated with native religion” (Wright), as long as these practices did not run counter to basic Christian tenets. The “fruit” of such missionaries’ labors often proved to be more abundant than that of their paternalistic, obstinate Christian brothers (and sisters).

It is not surprising that numerous American Indian writers would populate their fiction with these emissaries of Christianity who have played prominent roles in their history. As noted by Tinker, “Whatever the personal or ecclesiastical intentions of the missionary efforts among Indian peoples may have been, this evangelical outreach had deep political and social consequences both for the colonizer and for the colonized” (384). Consequences for the colonized include portrayals of Catholic priests and nuns in the works I have selected to discuss. *Winter in the Blood* by James Welch (Blackfeet/Gros Ventre), *The Surrounded* by D’Arcy McNickle (Cree/Salish), and *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* by Michael Dorris (Modoc) are all set in Montana. Tribes in that area were introduced to Christianity by Jesuit Fathers Nicolas Point and Pierre Jean de Smet, who arrived after Lewis and Clark’s expedition in 1840 (Wyckoff 274). Tales of these “Black Robes” spread, as did their influence. It was also Jesuits who brought Christianity to the Ojibwe in the Dakotas and Minnesota. Father Anthony Belcourt replaced Father Dumoulin in 1848 as missionary to the Indians living in the area around Pembina, including the Turtle Mountain Reservation (Reardon 80-81), which Louise Erdrich claims as home. Another Ojibwe writer, David Treuer, grew up on the Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota, also evangelized by Jesuits. Priests pervade works of these writers, specifically Treuer’s *Little* and Erdrich’s North Dakota saga. Two other major American Indian writers, N.

Scott Momaday (Kiowa) and Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), often set their works in the Southwest, where the first colonizers were Spanish. In Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Silko's "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," Franciscan priests, or "Brown Robes," appear. In all of these works, major writers offer an array of priestly insights into whiteness.

In *White*, Richard Dyer traces the evolution of the construction of whiteness, as attributed to certain groups of privileged people. He sees whiteness as embodiment, since it is on bodies that race is made visible, at least, to some extent. Whiteness, however, also involves "something that is *in* but not *of* the body" (14; emphasis added), and Christianity, the religion based on the incarnation, becomes a fitting vehicle for whiteness. The idea of the Word made flesh, of the spirit within the (white) body, encapsulates Dyer's concept of the white "race." Moreover, Dyer asserts that "[a]t some point, the embodied something else of whiteness took on a dynamic relation to the physical world, something caught by the ambiguous word 'spirit.' The white spirit organises white flesh and in turn non-white flesh and other material matters: it has *enterprise*" (15). This enterprising organization of "white flesh" is enacted through imperialism, colonialism, and, in America, "Manifest Destiny." To extend this enterprising spirit to Christianity, Dyer notes that certainly Christianity is not "of its essence white," but that it became "the religion, and religious export of Europe, . . . thought of and felt in distinctly white ways for most of its history" (17). Thus, not only have Christianity and colonialism been conflated in the history of America, but also whiteness.

However, although whiteness is "written" on the body, and is, therefore, visible, its "power is maintained by being unseen" (45). Whites must be viewed as the universal race, and, therefore, the one whose dominance is a given. As Ruth Frankenberg notes, "[W]hiteness makes

itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy, its transparency, in contrast with the marking of others on which its transparency depends” (6). This paradox of visibility and invisibility carries risks and proves difficult to sustain. As a non-color, white connotes “emptiness, non-existence and death” (Dyer 45), yet its color is essential in differentiating it from non-whites. Frankenberg seeks, through her collection of essays in *Displacing Whiteness*, to examine “how whiteness is performed by subjects. . . [and] what is at stake” (3). Stakes in this “game” are high: when whiteness is exposed as “masquerading as universal,” it risks being found out as not necessarily deserving of its dominance. In addition, whiteness falls prey to “slippage,” creating a category of “peoples who may be let in to whiteness under particular historical circumstances” (Dyer 19). Thus, in the history of the United States, slightly “off-white” peoples, such as Irish, Hispanics, Italians, and Jews, have been “made white,” depending on the economic and political needs of the time. Finally, the idea of privilege is automatically associated with whiteness and is detailed by Peggy McIntosh. This writer of “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” defines white privilege as “*unearned advantage* and *conferred dominance*” (126). Thus, whiteness incorporates dominance over non-whites, privilege, and assumed power, even in the midst of a threatening “slippage.”

Because Christianity, whiteness, and colonialism are inextricably bound together, Catholic priests and nuns are caught up in the net. Retaining the power and privilege of whiteness and colonialists while taking on the power of God, these missionizers embody Power. As mediators between God and humans, priests hear confessions, prescribe acts of penance, and enable forgiveness. In addition, priests have played mediating roles acting on the part of their Native tribes as they collide with government authorities and business forces. As an example,

Father Anthony Belcourt, along with his church and school, built “the first flour mill in North Dakota, thus taking an active part in the industrial as well as the religious development of the country” (Reardon 81). In addition, in 1854, he took to Washington, D. C., a list of “grievances and demands of the people of Pembina . . . [asking] that the Government make a treaty with the Indians for the purchase of their lands” (83). In addition, Father Belcourt’s list demanded buffalo hunting rights, the prohibition of liquor traffic, and military protection of his people (83). Also, as in the case of Father Belcourt, many priests set up schools taught by nuns; such parochial schooling became such an important method of colonization that the federal government joined forces. Passed in 1819, the Indian Civilization Fund Act “provided federal funding for ‘benevolent societies’ to instruct Indians in agriculture and Indian children ‘in reading, writing and arithmetic’” (Szasz 177). Of course, not all priests served their people in such benevolent ways; many maintained their stance on their pedestals of power, privilege, and whiteness. All, however, have made indelible marks on the lives of those they served, and these marks permeate the literatures of American Indians.

Historically and generally, priests and nuns bear their own burdens of battling the flesh and the spirit. As Dyer notes, “Christianity maintains a conception of a split between mind and body, regarding the latter as at the least inferior and often as evil. Yet it reproduces such dualistic thought only, magically, incomprehensibly, to transcend it in the spirit-in-the-body of Mary and Christ” (16). Thus, those in the Catholic Church who have chosen to devote their total beings to Christ as priests or nuns, take vows of chastity; they must effect this transcendence, overcoming the flesh by the spirit. This proves to be extremely difficult, and the resulting tensions between their spiritual and physical selves and temptations faced by these men

and women of God are not always overcome. Incidents of their homo- and/or heterosexual abuse abound, from the distant past to the present, to the extent of becoming sometimes stereotypical characteristics. However, stereotypes are merely norms, which may certainly be exceeded. In portraying priests and nuns, numerous American Indian writers, rather than stopping at stereotypes, construct, unmask, and enliven these whites who have infiltrated their tribes since the sixteenth century.

As previously mentioned, I have selected fictional works of James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, D'Arcy McNickle, N. Scott Momaday, David Treuer, Michael Dorris, and Louise Erdrich because of their interesting and diverse portrayals of priests and nuns. These portrayals will be discussed in ascending order, from the least prominent to the most in the works presented by these major authors. For each author, I will explore messages about whiteness as embodied by the priests and nuns in their works. In *Winter in the Blood*, James Welch's Father Kittredge plays a minor role and exhibits condescension toward his Native subjects. Silko's Father Paul plays a subordinate role in the old man's burial and reveals a resignation to Laguna Pueblo ways. Three different priests play roles in McNickle's *The Surrounded*, each exhibiting different messages about whiteness. In *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday's Fray Nicolás and Father Olguin, although Spanish and not necessarily "white," suffer from tensions and temptations accompanying this vocation. The most scathing critiques of priests can be found in Treuer's *Little*, whose three priests exhibit whiteness at its worst—impotent, indifferent, and exploitative. Nuns and priests exert significant influences on the lives of all three narrators in Dorris's *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*. Finally, in several of Erdrich's works can be found the most salient roles of priests and nuns. These characters exhibit an entire spectrum of whiteness,

from fulfilling to exploding stereotypes. Whether having known such bearers of Catholicism first-hand or having heard of them through stories, these major American Indian writers reveal intimate knowledge of this specific category of white colonizers. Moreover, although having deep-seated reasons for portraying such whites bitterly, these writers paint honest, fair, and variegated portraits of the “saints” populating their novels.

In *Winter in the Blood*, James Welch’s nameless narrator mentions Teresa, his Catholic mother, who drinks with her “priest from Harlem [Montana], a round man with distant eyes, who refused to set foot on the reservation. He never buried Indians in their family graveyards; instead he made them come to him, to *his* church, *his* saints and holy water, his feuding eyes” (4-5; emphasis added). This modern priest is bitterly portrayed by the narrator, who implies the priest’s infidelity to his vows of celibacy. Upon finding a letter to his mother from the priest, the son is tempted to read it: “I wanted to read it, to see what a priest would have to say to a woman who was his friend. I had heard of priests having drinking partners, fishing partners, but never a woman partner” (58). However, the narrator refuses to open the letter because the thought of seeing his “Mother’s name inside the envelope, in a letter written by a white man who refused to bury Indians in their own plots” (59) sickens him. He tears up the letter, feeling “vaguely satisfied” (59).

When Teresa’s mother dies, the narrator discovers that Teresa has already taken his grandmother to Harlem, where ““they have to fix her up. . . and make her look nice”” (134). Also, Teresa states, ““And Father Kittredge will want to say a few words over her”” (143). The narrator argues with his mother: ““But it would have been easier to bury her here. . . . She didn’t even to go church”” (134). To this, Teresa responds that the body will be brought back to the

reservation to be buried; however, the priest will not be able to attend the burial. He is busy preparing to move to Idaho. Her son states, ““I don’t think anybody I know is going to miss him”” (134). The Harlem priest acts true to his own belief—not to set foot on the reservation, even to bury the mother of his “drinking partner” Teresa. This priest, coldhearted and self-centered, is certainly not one of those who dedicated his life to living with a tribe; his model of Christianity is not conducive to anyone’s converting, at least, among these Blackfeet who populate Welch’s novel.

Thus, in Welch’s novel, Father Kittredge embodies the white characteristics of privilege and unquestioned power, merited merely because of skin color. This priest’s messages of whiteness coincide with Dyer’s claim that “white people are systematically privileged in Western society” (9) and with McIntosh’s concept of privilege as “*unearned advantage and conferred dominance*” (126), Father Kittredge chooses to use his white privilege as “permission to escape or to dominate” (126). He escapes his role of first-hand, up-close serving those he strives to convert, exploiting his “conferred dominance.” To Father Kittredge, his whiteness and his exalted position as priest allow him free rein to treat his people as he pleases. If he does not want to sully himself by stepping foot on the reservation, that is his right. If he has a female Indian “drinking partner,” that is also his right, as is his privilege to use her for his own purposes. His refusal to attend the burial of Teresa’s mother reinforces his hypocrisy in preaching love and compassion. From the writings of William Apess to those of the present, American Indians have strongly attacked white Christians for their hypocrisy, and Welch’s Father Kittredge embodies no such message to counter this attack.

The next priest, Father Paul, plays a significant role in Silko's "The Man to Send Rain Clouds." A legacy of the first Franciscan priests of the Southwest, Father Paul embodies the white authority of the Church while exhibiting the potential for such authority to accommodate to others' needs. In the short story, the old man, Teofilo, is found dead by Leon and Ken, who perform their traditional Laguna ritual of preparing the body for burial. Leon smiles as they finish and addresses the old man: "Send us rain clouds, Grandfather" (358). Driving home with the blanket-wrapped body in the back of the pickup, the two men encounter Father Paul, who asks about Teofilo. The conversation that follows reveals interesting insights into the character of Leon as well as the priest:

Leon stopped the truck. "Good morning, Father. We were just out to the sheep camp. Everything is O.K. now."

"Thank God for that. Teofilo is a very old man. You really shouldn't allow him to stay at the sheep camp alone."

"No, he won't do that any more now."

"Well, I'm glad you understand. I hope I'll be seeing you at Mass this week—we missed you last Sunday. See if you can get old Teofilo to come with you." The priest smiled and waved at them as they drove away. (358)

Leon, quick to show respect to the priest, answers truthfully while not divulging the whole truth. The priest, noting that Leon understands him, fails to understand Leon. After all, Father Paul is the priest, and Leon and Teofilo merely his "flock," who must be admonished for missing Mass but invited to come again.



Later in the day, the traditional funeral is held, attended by the clanspeople. Afterwards, Leon's wife Louise requests that the priest come to sprinkle "holy water for Grandpa. So he won't be thirsty" (359). This blend of traditional and Christian beliefs reveals the influence of the colonizers' religion and the resistance of the colonized. Leon acquiesces to Louise's wishes, goes to the church, and asks Father Paul to bring his "holy water to the graveyard" (360). The priest at first turns away, then chides Leon: "Why didn't you tell me he was dead? I could have brought the Last Rites anyway" (360). The next lines, again, reveal important insights into both characters:

Leon smiled. "It wasn't necessary, Father."

The priest stared down at his scuffed brown loafers and the worn hem of his cassock. "For a Christian burial it was necessary."

His voice was distant, and Leon thought that his blue eyes looked tired.

"It's O.K. Father, we just want him to have plenty of water."

The priest sank down into the green chair and picked up a glossy missionary magazine. He turned the colored pages full of lepers and pagans without looking at them.

"You know I can't do that, Leon. There should have been the Last Rites and a funeral Mass at the very least." (360)

Although the priest appears to be inflexible, clues to his next move are evident here. His initial vision of missionizing these Native people, of making certain that they conform exactly to his own mold of Christianity, has become blurred. Instead, "the worn hem of his cassock" and the "glossy missionary magazine" with its "colored pages full of lepers and pagans" that he does not

really look at, suggest his own change. In addition, the priest's distant voice and tired blue eyes reveal Father Paul's resignation.

Following Leon out the door, the priest procures his holy water, still with misgivings. As he approaches the small wrapped body at the grave, he even wonders if Teofilo is actually inside, or if the entire event is not "some perverse Indian trick—something they did in March to ensure a good harvest" (361). His thoughts as he sprinkles his holy water anyway, echo his feelings of ambiguity: "He sprinkled the grave and the water disappeared almost before it touched the dim, cold sand"; it reminded him of something—he tried to remember what it was, because he thought if he could remember he might understand this" (361). The vanishing water "might suggest the superficial impact of Christianity on the Laguna" (Roemer, E-mail, 15 Jan. 2008), reinforced by the fact that Leon insists on this Christian ritual for his grandfather. The "something" that the priest cannot remember seems to humble him somewhat by revealing his desire to understand these people's beliefs as related to his own. Completing his task, he walks slowly back to his church. His act, however, satisfies Leon, who is "happy about the sprinkling of the holy water; now the old man could send them big thunderclouds for sure" (361). As Leon "re-imagines (and re-invents the white Christian symbol) with his enthusiasm about how the water will help the old man bring rain clouds—an extremely important function of the departed ancestor" (Roemer, E-mail, 15 Jan. 2008). In his re-imagining, Leon has succeeded in both implicitly resisting the white, colonialist priest's ways and redirecting those ways to conform to his own.

This Franciscan priest, early in the story, embodies stereotypical messages of whiteness as befitting those dominant, paternalistic authorities over their colonized subjects. By the time the story ends, however, Father Paul has taken the first step in learning "to tolerate if not

encourage certain group practices originally associated with native religion” (Wright). No longer one of those priests “[t]horoughly blinded by their immersion in their own culture and their implicit acceptance of the illusion of European superiority” (Tinker 382), Father Paul begins the humbling task of his own adaptation to the people he is sent to serve. He begins to be more like many Natives, who, according to Tinker, have “the inherent and enduring cultural value of openness to the spirituality of others and a long tradition of borrowing from one another” (383). Because of this characteristic, many tribal peoples “often expressed surprise as they discovered that the new spirituality of the missionaries called on them to abandon their traditional ways in favor of a wholesale adoption of the European way, since their previous experience had always been one of adding to and not replacing their own spiritual ways” (383). It is such accretion that Momaday reveals in Father Olguin in *House Made of Dawn*. Here, once this priest begins “to sense the rhythm of life in the ancient town” which he serves, he notes that “his own pulse should eventually conform to it” (65). However, this knowledge comes neither easily nor quickly.

Father Olguin is one of two priests portrayed in Momaday’s *House*; the other is his predecessor, Fray Nicolás, revealed only through his journals. Although both of these priests are of (colonialist) Spanish descent, and Father Olguin specifically comes from “his native Mexico” (28), they are considered outsiders to the Indians whom they seek to convert. As Dyer notes in *White*, since Christianity became “the religion, and religious export, of Europe, indelibly marking its culture and consciousness, it has also been thought and felt in distinctly *white* ways for most of its history” (17; emphasis added). Moreover, Jace Weaver, in *That the People Might Live*, notes that “racially based definitions are insufficient; what matters is one’s social and

cultural milieu, one's way of life" (6). Quoting Geary Hobson's illustration of how this applies to Hispanics, Weaver continues: "'While they are undeniably of Indian blood, and genetically Indian, they are nevertheless culturally and socially Spanish. Because of centuries of Catholicism, they are for the most part irrevocably alienated from the Native American portion of their heritage'" (6). Indeed, Father Olguin feels alienated; as he drives to town where a celebration is beginning and people are all around, the descriptions of them are of disgust: "men and women, bloated or shriveled up with age, children running and writhing on the sheer tide of revelry. . . . Fear and revulsion jarred upon his brain" (Momaday, *House* 69). When he sees a baby on a cradleboard, the description reinforces his sense of disgust: "Its little eyes were overhung with fat. . . . The hair lay in tight wet rings above the eyes and all the shapeless flesh of the face dropped with sweat . . . . Flies crawled upon the face and lay thick about the eyes and mouth" (69). Louis Owens suggests that "in Father Olguin's vision the baby becomes a threatening sign of the priest's 'otherness' in this world" (107). Thus, even though he is described as "a small, swarthy man" (Momaday, *House* 28) born in Mexico, the priest is "white," an outsider, because of his white religion and his ancestors' actions toward the Native inhabitants.

Not only are such white priests separated from the people, but Momaday sees Christians as separated from their God, as noted by Rainwater: "[D]espite their words and good intentions, Christians seem tragically detached from their God, the vital source of their words" (160). If, indeed, Momaday's claim is valid, then the roles of priests as mediators between God and humans become crucial. However, if priests are detached from the people they serve, the possibility for true communion through their mediation becomes even more difficult.

Furthermore, the human frailties of priests, as revealed in Momaday's narrative, complicate the mediative process.

Both priests embody human frailties, struggles between the spirit and the flesh. Such struggles are inherent in whiteness and its embodiment in Christianity, as Dyer notes (16), especially for priests and nuns, who take vows of chastity. Overcoming the temptations of the flesh through the spirit proves to be difficult indeed, and is often not achieved. Father Olguin, observing Angela Grace St. John, wonders "that her physical presence should suddenly dawn upon him so. She was more nearly beautiful than he had thought at first" (Momaday, *House* 30). Later, when he visits her to invite her to the feast of Santiago, "[h]e wanted to stay, to look at her and listen to her voice, but she was brooding, absent, and he said good night" (37). The next evening, after Father Olguin and Angela attend the feast, the priest returns to his room but finds, as usual, that he cannot sleep. It is in such times of solitude, however, that he likes "best to use his mind, to read and write with cigarettes and black coffee. Then, alone with himself, he could take stock of all his resources and prospects, and he could find his place among them" (45). He opens the old journals of Fray Nicolás, and reads from several entries beginning with 1874. It is here that he finds some consolation regarding his own frailties, as he reads of the shocking sins of the other priest.

Fray Nicolás's writings include descriptions of Abel's grandfather Francisco as a boy, of the priest's consumptive fits of coughing, and of his deep love for God. He writes that God has told him, "Nicolás thy whole life thou art the midwife of My Coming" (47). However, his intimacy with God is not always felt; after recounting one particular day, Fray Nicolás pleads with God to restore him. Then, he adds: "I am awakened coughing by something of the cold &

dark terrible & strange & I fell out on my knees & rattled with cold on the floor. It seemed as tho' I had done some evil & I" (48). Thus ends that day's entry for Nov. 22, yet the ending is not a closing out of thought but a foreboding. A letter, written 14 years later and addressed to "My dearest brother J. M." (50), is inserted in the journal, and here more of the priest's troubled thoughts are revealed. He writes of Francisco, by then grown, and though a sacristan serving Fray Nicolás, the young man also worships Satan. Moreover, the priest believes that Francisco "has been with Porcingula Pecos a vile one I assure you & she is already swoln up with it & and likely diseased too. God grant it" (51). The priest's pain and bitterness might be explained by his subsequent words:

He was so fair a child & I did like to play cross with him & and touch him after to make him laugh. Did I tell you once he fell in the river & was no more than 6 or 7 & I made him take off his clothes & stand naked by the fire & he was shaking & ashamed & the next day brought me *piñones* from the hills? (51)

Intimations of sexual abuse (or, at least, voyeurism) can be discerned and would serve to explain Fray Nicolás's internal strife with his Lord as well as his scathing words about Francisco. In addition, the priest's note that the boy "was so fair" suggests the "Fray Nicolas would love to see Francisco as a white embodiment," reinforced by his desire for Francisco to be an altar boy, "a child of the church" (Roemer, Email 15 Jan. 2008).

If the suggestion of sexual abuse of Francisco is valid, it is compounded by the fact that Fray Nicolás is the father of Francisco. Susan Scarberry-Garcia, in *Landmarks of Healing*, notes that "[t]he genealogy of Abel's family is cryptic" but that Fray Nicolás fathered both Francisco and Porcingula (149 n140). In her discussion of the Navajo Mountain Chant, Scarberry-Garcia

adds that this “story also develops the incest/adultery theme that is played out in the novel in relationship to Fray Nicholas’s [sic] affair with the witch Nicolás [sic] *teah-whau* and Nicholas’s illegitimate son Francisco’s parallel affair with Porcingula, his sister or half sister” (66). Thus, the sexual exploits of Fray Nicolás intermingle with those of Francisco, and “the iniquity of the fathers on the children” (Ex. 20:5) is passed on.

The confessional letter continues, as Fray Nicolás adds, “I think He does console me but I am not consoled . . . . He does bid me speak all my love but I cannot for I am always just then under it the whole heft of it & am mute against it as against a little mountain heaved upon me. . . . Thus does He chide me & I take some humor it in for surely I would not be lost & scolded too” (Momaday, *House* 51-52). Possibly, the burden of his sin weighs heavily on the soul of the priest, and his written confession offers no relief. His fear of being “lost” is countered only by the fact that he is being chided by His Father. The Scripture, “For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines” (Heb. 12:6), provides affirmation of Fray Nicolás’s salvation.

It is this affirmation of forgiveness and redemption of his predecessor that provides Father Olguin a type of solace; he is “consoled now that he had seen to the saint’s heart. This was what he had been waiting for, a particular glimpse of his own ghost, a small, innocuous ecstasy” (Momaday, *House* 51). In reading of the former priest’s troubles and transgressions, Father Olguin is able to make peace with his own. He realizes that “[h]e was troubled too, of course; he had that obligation. But he had been made the gift, as it were, of another man’s sanctity, and it would accommodate him very well” (51). ). Clinging to the faith in Fray Nicolás’s “sanctity” as a priest, Father Olguin is reassured of his own and is granted peace: “He

replaced the letter and closed the book. He could sleep now, and tomorrow he would become a figure, an example in the town” (51).

Father Olguin does seem to be different after this particular evening. He even begins to accept the beliefs of the townspeople, though so different from his own: “These full summer days he breathed more peacefully . . . . By the grace of these last few days, the affairs of the parish had been set in order. He was content” (65). It is then that he begins “to sense the rhythm of life in the ancient town,” and realizes that he “should eventually conform to it” (65).

Although he finds himself thinking of Angela, “[h]e could do so now without the small excitement that she had so easily provoked within him at first. He was aware of her as a woman, of course, but he was no longer disturbed by her” (66). Father Olguin even drives to visit her, to tell her of the upcoming festival of the Pecos bull. It is during this visit, however, that Angela mocks him and laughs bitterly; this horrifies Father Olguin, and “[h]e stiffened. There was nothing then but her voice in the room, going on wearily, without inflection, even after he had ceased to hear” (68). Any latent feelings he had for her are erased by her mockery and her “hard and brittle” laughter, described as “far from desperate, underlain with perfect presence, nearly too controlled” (68).

After seven years, Father Olguin is described as having “grown calm with duty and design. . . . He thought of himself not as happy (for he looked down on that particular abstraction) but in some real sense composed and at peace. In the only way possible, perhaps, he had come to terms with the town, and that, after all, had been his aim” (174). Here, it sounds as if this priest’s own peace has been more important to him than that of his people. His aim has been not to convert the people, nor necessarily to serve them, but to reconcile himself to their



ways so that his own mind could be set to rest and his own soul could still be saved. During these years, he still has a sense of estrangement, having secluded himself from the people, enjoying his “safe and sacred solitude” (174). He knows he has been a good example to the people and has engaged in good works. Occasionally, he reads from the old journal, “and with it he performed the mild spiritual exercise that always restored him to faith and humility” (174). Yet, how exactly does this “mild spiritual exercise” work? Does it make him feel better about his own shortcomings by reading about those of Fray Nicolás? Rainwater states that the journal entries “influence Father Olguin’s change of heart toward his mission among the Indians. Fray Nicolás reflects back to him his own faults, especially his blinding ethnocentrism” (*Dreams* 137). However, I contend that Father Olguin continually focuses more on himself than on “his mission.” In fact, his good works are not evident at all in the course of the novel, except perhaps when he testifies for Abel in the murder trial. The priest’s attempts to clear Abel of guilt on the basis of his killing “something like” an evil spirit rather than merely a man come to no avail (Momaday, *House* 94). Even in this situation, the priest is portrayed as having “wanted to affect great humility” (94); thus, he is still more egocentric, rather than becoming more ethnocentric, as Rainwater suggests.

Father Olguin’s final words in the novel do, however, reveal a change of heart. After Abel awakens the priest before dawn to tell him of Francisco’s death, Father Olguin exclaims, ““Dead? Oh . . . yes—yes, of course. But *good heavens*, couldn’t you have waited until— ”” (190). After Abel repeats his news, the priest says, ““Good Lord, what time is it, anyway? Do you know what *time* it is? I can understand how you must feel, but—”” (190). Much more concerned with the fact that he was so abruptly awakened at such an ungodly hour, Father

Olguin seems not to “understand” at all. However, after Abel leaves, “Father Olguin shivered with cold and peered out into the darkness. ‘I can understand,’ he said. ‘I understand, do you hear?’ And he began to shout. ‘I understand! Oh *God!* *I understand—I understand!*’” (190). The cause of this sudden insight is only implied; Owens suggests that it “may be partly wish-fulfillment” (108). Interestingly, Father Olguin receives this enlightenment after peering “out into the darkness” (Momaday, *House* 190). Perhaps his gaining of insight is apparent in tracing the progression of his thought process through his words. First, Father Olguin states, “I can understand”; next, he broadcasts his understanding: “I understand, do you hear?” Then, he shouts, “I understand!” Finally, directly addressing his God and emphatically exclaiming his understanding, the priest shouts his triumph. Yet, as Owens also notes, Father Olguin’s “insight will remain inevitably partial. . . [as] suggested by his one opaque and sightless eye” (108).

Father Olguin, unlike Fray Nicolás, has achieved a sense of sympathy and of personal peace. He has accommodated himself to these people whom he came to convert and has allowed himself to feel successful in his mission. He has begun to overcome what Rainwater terms “his blinding ethnocentrism” (137). This accretion of new, Christian beliefs upon those of the Jemez Pueblo and Navajo people is insightfully expressed by Momaday:

The invaders were a long time conquering them; and now, after four centuries of Christianity, they still pray in Tanoan to the old deities of the earth and sky. . . . They have assumed the names and gestures of their enemies, but have held on to their own, secret souls; and in this there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting. (*House* 56)

Thus, the conversion of these people to the “white” religion is not a total one, as expected and required by their Christian missionaries. Instead, these Native people continue in “their own, secret souls” to resist, to outwait, and to ultimately overcome their colonizers, in this area, anyway. Some priests are able to apprehend and accept this act of resistance; they, then, along with Father Olguin, can say, “*Oh God! I understand—I understand!*”

Nevertheless, Father Olguin’s understanding and Fray Nicolás’s consolation are only partial. Both priests are still “white” in that they remain separated from their people and ensconced in their egocentric concerns. Fray Nicolás persists in rehashing his past sins and failures and seeking reassurance of his salvation; Father Olguin continues to retreat into his “safe and sacred solitude” (174). Thus, through their thoughts and deeds, these priests embody the message that whiteness is still superior to “others.”

In D’Arcy McNickle’s 1936 novel *The Surrounded*, two of the three priests portrayed achieve a similar understanding to that revealed in Momaday’s Father Olguin and Silko’s Father Paul. However, McNickle’s Fathers Grepilloux and Cristadore act upon their understanding, resulting in a notable difference seen by the people they serve. Father Grepilloux, the 81-year-old priest, started the Mission of St. Xavier on the Flathead reservation in Montana: “He had reared it [the Mission] up in the wilderness and then, years ago, had gone on to other duties like a soldier whose course is plotted for him by his superiors. . . . [and] had come back to write a history of his work and to sink peacefully into oblivion” (36). However, because of his deep compassion for the people, he cannot “sink into oblivion”; on the contrary, he is lovingly remembered:

No one, however, had spent a longer time there [at the Mission], or been more devoted, or succeeded so well in winning the affection and loyalty of the Salish people. Of all the white men they knew, they used to say in the early days, he was the only one who did not speak “with a forked tongue.” And on his part the feeling he bore them was simple, undivided and unfailing devotion. He might bewail their ignorance, but he never cast doubt on their native ability. (40)

Thus, Father Grepilloux is portrayed as a priest of understanding, as well as one who acts out his Christian principles. He is writing a journal, which includes a history of the Mission and stories of the people, and he often discusses his work with his friend Max Leon, the Spaniard husband of Catharine (Salish) and father of Archilde.

In his history, Father Grepilloux recounts the coming of the Jesuits, who “had been invited by these Indians to come here and instruct them” (46). The Salish had heard of a “Black Robe” and had sent for him; however, it was a Protestant minister who came first. Since he had a wife and did not wear a robe, the Salish were disappointed; he was not what they had wanted: ““You are not the Teacher we seek. You are not of those Black Robes who take no wives, who say the Mass, and who carry the Cross”” (48). When these “Black Robes” did arrive later, the Salish Chief (through an interpreter) said: ““We have been worshiping False Gods, and we want you to teach us the True God”” (47). After reading this tale to the surprised Max Leon, who had no idea that the Salish had sent for the priests or that they had been so friendly with whites, Father Grepilloux adds:

“You have least to complain of. You lose your sons, but these people have lost a way of life, and with it their pride, their dignity, their strength . . . . Gross-

natured officials have despoiled them, they are insulted when they present grievances. Of course”—since Grepilloux was a priest, and a faithful one, he added what in his heart seemed to balance all that he had set against it—“they have God.” (59).

Just as Father Grepilloux balances his assessments of the Salish, McNickle balances his portrayal of this priest of understanding with a caveat. A priest is, after all, still a priest with his own agenda.

One agenda item of Father Grepilloux is to encourage any young Indian who exhibits intelligence and a desire to break away from the “primitive world” (59) of the Salish. He sees such promise in Archilde Leon and directs him to Father Cristadore for help with his music. In the eyes of Archilde, this musical priest is quite different: “He did not have a religious face, which should be rather long and rather thin and rather sad. Father Cristadore had a perfectly round face and his cheeks were two round red apples. He did not mind laughing if something amused him” (98). This white priest departs from Archilde’s stereotypical view of priests, and even though Father Cristadore knows little about the violin, “he was full of music” (99). Archilde finds that he enjoys these hours of music studies with this un-priestlike priest, who values the time, too, until he can “no longer postpone the duties awaiting him” and closes “the piano with a sigh” (99).

Father Grepilloux’s insight into Archilde, whose passion for music he encourages, is one more manifestation of his love for the Salish. Upon the old priest’s death, Max Leon recalls his friend: “His affection for all Indians was deep and in practical matters he understood them. . . . He was at once superior to them and able to place himself on their level when occasion required

it. . . .He despised and inveighed against those who despoiled the Indians” (137). However, the death of Father Grepilloux also prompts Max to ponder the effects not only of this priest and his Mission, but also of the “progress” of white “civilization” brought to the Indians: “As for the Indians who had been taught to understand sin, certainly they [schools, farms, railroads] offered no satisfaction. Instead one had to ask of them—were they saved or were they destroyed? Bringing the outside world to them was not exactly like bringing heaven to them” (139). With all these doubts, Max struggles but finally resolves that “[i]n performing the labor to which he had been called he had fulfilled himself. That was all a man ever did” (139). Upon hearing Father Grepilloux called a saint at his funeral, Max concludes: “If Grepilloux were a saint, then it was God’s good that had been served and you could not go behind that” (141). The priest’s saintliness seems to be verified at his burial, when sunlight breaks through the clouds so that the mountains “shone with blinding splendor” (142). Whites and Indians alike attending the funeral are “overwhelmed by the spectacle of the grave” (141) of this beloved man of (the whites’) God.

With the old priest’s passing away, comes a younger priest, Father Jerome, who does not at all measure up to his predecessor. When Catharine Leon is dying, Archilde goes to get this priest, who sees his job as “a necessary but somewhat unpleasant drudgery” (262). He becomes impatient with “the Indian congregation which sat always at the back of the church [and] still followed its old custom of breaking out into its own prayers and its own songs at odd moments of the Mass” (263). Father Jerome is portrayed as “not really prejudiced. . . . It was rather that his task seemed thankless and he was not enthusiastic about it. . . He was dull; he neither scolded nor exhorted; he dogmatized” (263). Although portrayed here as dispassionate, Father Jerome does act passionately, in fact, with vehemence toward Archilde. He tells Archilde that Catharine,

after having confessed to the crime of killing the game warden, did not obey the priest. She was supposed to send Archilde to him and then to return to Father Jerome “for further instruction” (264). For this neglect, Father Jerome scolds Archilde: “[Y]ou must realize that the law officers should be informed. You are civilized people now. . . . Afterward, come to me to confession. . . .[and] do as I say, for the good of your soul” (265). Later, exerting his pride and power again as he appears at Catharine’s death to perform Extreme Unction, Father Jerome expresses his wrath at Archilde. The son insists that his mother has renounced her Christianity and that the priest “ought to let her die her own way” (274). As a white priest of little understanding, Father Jerome considers this statement as blasphemy and continues his duty, forcing the last rites on his subject.

Thus, the third priest portrayed in McNickle’s *The Surrounded*, does seem to fulfill some of the stereotypical traits of not necessarily white priests, but of whites in general. Pride, condescension, and control, all traits of whiteness, are embodied in Father Jerome. Louis Owens, however, does not mention this typically “white” priest, but condemns Father Grepilloux for his “complete failure to understand the Indian world” (69). The fact that he sees Archilde’s “salvation” in going to Europe to study music reinforces “the Church’s single-minded desire that the Indian become as Europeanized as possible” (69). Although this criticism may be a fair one, the old priest at least has tried to carry out “the Church’s single-minded desire” in a loving, compassionate manner, living and working with the people. He neither takes on their beliefs nor acts out of his own selfish needs; rather, he seeks to understand these people he has come to serve. Certainly, he does exhibit the paternalism of many white “superiors,” and it is this attitude that could merit some criticism of Owens. Father Cristadore, whose role is omitted in Owens’s

critique, embodies yet a different message of whiteness. This jovial priest, with his propensity to laugh, to relish music, and to get lost in the moment, reveals a side of white priests that is generally not noted. Stepping down from priestly pedestal to teach Archilde the violin, Father Cristadore, “full of music” (99), neglects his duties as long as possible. Thus, McNickle offers, in each of his priests, different messages of whiteness, departing from stereotypes. He reveals, to use Ruth Frankenberg’s words, “whiteness unfrozen. . . . [whiteness] as a process, not a ‘thing,’ as plural rather than singular in nature” (1).

In stark contrast, David Treuer’s three priests in *Little*, are portrayed as utterly “frozen,” especially as they act, or fail to act, in the bitterly cold Minnesota setting. Not one of the three priests in this 1995 novel could be construed as loving or willing to serve and understand his people. Paul, the most prominent priest in the novel, ends up on the reservation not out of choice but out of circumstance. Assigned to fill the position of Father Gundesohn, who died “by drowning in the baptismal urn” (139), Paul is driven to the reservation rectory by another priest, Father Offstahd. This “trinity” of priests is portrayed during the long drive with Father Offstahd’s droning words, Paul’s preoccupations, and Father Gundesohn’s phantom presence. Yet, it is their figurative and “white” absence that prevails.

Father Offstahd, the priest from the town next to the reservation, drives Paul to his new home and enjoys the break in the tedium of his life. Bored with all of his priestly, routine duties “of Ash Wednesdays and Palm Sundays, Christmas, confession, and the weekly sermons he didn’t even get to make up himself” (142), Father Offstahd finds pleasure solely at funerals. There, the eulogies are the only sermons he gets to write himself. Described as the asthmatic “fat priest” with “phlegmy sighs,” Father Offstahd “speaks on and on [to Paul], never dislodging



the sweat that perched on his clammy hairless lip” (136). Although he knows that Paul is not listening, Father Offstahd continues his story of the mysterious death of Father Gundesohn. Welcoming any possible diversion from his “interminable boredom” (144), he relishes telling this tragic tale of death on the reservation. Father Offstahd had never liked the now dead priest, whose “summer youth league softball team always beat his even though Father Gundesohn’s team was all Indian and he was drunk on J&B scotch every single game” (141). However, Father Offstahd’s glee results not only because his rival is dead, but also because he firmly believes Father Gundesohn was murdered. This notion gives Father Offstahd “the space in which to cherish the circumstances and the facts as other people cherished children for years and years and years” (143). Even many years later, after Father Offstahd is house-bound, he “sat in his armchair and religiously watched the Father Dowling Mysteries” (143), in which he imagined himself as Father Dowling. As it turns out, his hunch about murder is correct, but that is not revealed until near the end of the novel.

As Paul, the replacement priest, rides to his rectory, his sense of absence is accentuated by the third-person omniscient narrator. (Interestingly, Paul’s chapters are among the few not narrated in first-person, suggesting perhaps that priests do not merit a personal narrative, but must remain detached.) This narrator notes a multitude of things that Paul misses, does not notice, does not know, and cannot imagine; the presence of negatives foregrounds the absence of sensibility of this white priest. Although the narrator states that Paul “gazed,” and “stared,” only what the priest *cannot* see is described: “the smaller highways . . . with no shoulders. . . . no factories and no plants,” no nutrients in the soil, no hay in the “sagging barns” (138-39). In addition, all that Paul does *not* hear or understand or connect is detailed:

Paul didn't hear [Father Offstahd]. . . . He didn't realize the absurdity of a death by drowning in holy water any more than he understood or listened to what his responsibilities as the new priest were to be. Paul couldn't connect because he had no idea, no clear vision . . . . he couldn't imagine what the church looked like. . . . Paul didn't know whether there were any stained-glass windows. . . . And Paul certainly did not know that the house in which he was to live was painted pink. (139)

When he does arrive at the church, Paul sees "no windows on the front" and no "bells or loudspeakers" in the belfry (145). However, what he does notice is that the rectory's pink exterior is not nearly as disturbing as its blindingly white interior.

Images of whiteness, absence, and negativity accumulate. As Paul sits in his white kitchen, he notes that "the linoleum was sparking white. . . . The wooden cupboards had all been painted white. . . . The refrigerator was white inside and out. . . . The four chairs that surrounded the Formica table were wooden. . . . White, of course" (146-47). The priest's own whiteness blends in with the whiteness of his surroundings, as well as with the absence of color, of beauty, and of life. Since Paul arrives in March while the cold still pervades the northern Minnesota landscape, he sees "no crocuses, no tulips, no daffodils. . . . no hanging vines , no creeping flowers. . . . certainly no bougainvillea and no magnolia trees" (149). However, even in the midst of such dearth of color and life, Paul thinks of tomorrow and envisions somewhat of a future for himself.

He attempts to inject life into the overwhelming whiteness: "Gazing through the dark over to the church across the road he noted the obvious affinity between the white church and his

white kitchen. . . . Since they were linked in color Paul thought of how people would gather in his kitchen to discuss personal matters with him as they would gather across the street to discuss personal matters with God” (152). Of course, such a vision does not materialize; on the contrary, even Paul’s carefully calculated plan to bring color to his sermon is foiled by his absence of true vision. In carefully observing the church, he notes that although the steeple is “just a shell with a sharp point, perched on top of the pathetic little church with no purpose whatsoever” (213), there is one stained-glass window. This is located “in the back of the church, set in the wall behind the altar” (214), facing west. Since sunlight would never shine through the window in the morning services, Paul changes the time of one particular Mass to evening and plans a sermon which he will finish with a flourish right at the time of sunset (as determined by the *Farmer’s Almanac*). However, he neglects “to consider that tall pines grew up to the back of the church, and as the sun went down they took in its final light, and Paul was stretching his empty, soft hands out to the five people who had bothered to show up” (214). Not only does his sermon end in its usual absence of color, but his congregation is marked by its (usual?) absence of people.

Just as Paul’s vision of injecting color and life into the church does not materialize, neither does his vision of people gathering “in his kitchen to discuss personal matters with him.” In fact, “in the years ahead no one would ever enter his kitchen of their own volition” (152). Only once do people gather in there, one Halloween night, when Little, Donovan, and Jackie break Paul’s storm window with an egg. The priest asks the children to come in and discuss this problem, and when Little sees Paul’s vestments hanging on the handle of the (white) refrigerator, he screams and screams the only word he has ever spoken: ““You! You! You!”” (221). This

“gathering” becomes a climactic scene in the novel as Little’s screams intensify and he collapses on the floor. Of course, Paul has no inkling of the cause of Little’s outburst.

In a chapter entitled “You,” Father Gundesohn’s tale is finally told, in second-person: “*He comes staggering whip-drunk across the road, black shoes scudding the frozen tar. You’d see him if you looked harder out your winter window, hear him if you just sat still*” (234). The priest proceeds down the aisle of the church, stopping where Celia is scrubbing the floor. He slips on the wet wood, falls on her, and rapes her as she screams “*My God!*” (235). He stands and turns around to find Celia’s mother Jeanette yelling; then, “*he jumps back in surprise and slips on the wet floor*” (235). He then strikes his head on the sharp corner of the stand holding the baptismal font. Still conscious, he is suffocated by Jeanette and Celia, who stuff snow into his mouth. Then, the two women tip the baptismal urn over onto the dead priest’s chest. This happens in February, and in June, Celia’s boyfriend Stan returns from Vietnam. Five months later, she gives birth to Little, claimed always by Stan as his son. Father Gundesohn, though physically absent in the novel until this scene, materializes to become the tragic catalyst to the narrative. He is the “You” of Little’s one-word vocabulary, the reason for Paul’s impotent presence on the reservation, the highlight of Father Offstahd’s monotonous life.

These three priests, whether absent spiritually, emotionally, or physically from the people they are supposed to serve, epitomize whiteness, according to Richard Dyer. Viewing white as color yet not quite, Dyer explores this paradox:

White is both a colour and, at once, not a colour and the sign of that which is colourless because it cannot be seen: the soul, the mind, and also emptiness, non-existence and death, all of which form part of what makes white people socially

white. Whiteness is the sign that makes white people visible as white, while simultaneously signifying the true character of white people, which is invisible.

(45)

Dyer contends that whites must be visible in order to be “recognizable and representable, since this is a major currency of communication and power. Being visible as white is a passport to privilege” (44). At the same time, however, the invisibility of whiteness is crucial since it hearkens back to spirit, that distinguishing characteristic of whites which prompts aspiration, enterprise, imperialism, and mastery of the white body (23). Such paradoxical qualities of whiteness cause a “slippage” between visibility and invisibility and between presence and absence; furthermore, “[i]t is this sense of absence that also proves white peoples’ greatest weakness, for in it lies the desolate suspicion of non-existence” (45).

Treuer’s three white priests, notable mainly for their absences, embody this “greatest weakness,” that of “the desolate suspicion of non-existence.” Father Gundesohn is absent physically and, thus, is invisible until the vivid description of his deserved end. The instrument of his death, both a baptismal font with its live-giving holy water, and snow, a form of frozen water, reverses the Christian death-rebirth belief. However, through him comes the birth of Little, whose self-inflicted death by drowning in the water tower, provides its own ironic twist to the story. Donovan, witness of Little’s death, asks, “Doesn’t it make sense that the water supply was the best way for him to be in everything? Touching, filling, completing everything with holes in it. Now every person that got city water would be with him” (231). Little’s death is one of flowing, filling, life-giving water, while Father Gundesohn’s death by frozen water typifies his heartless, self-serving (non)existence.

The other two priests, physically present but spiritually and emotionally absent, act, or fail to act, with a “desolate suspicion of non-existence.” Father Offstahd, desolate in his dull life, predicts that Paul’s ministry, “living and preaching in that community was worse than death, not because the town and congregation were mostly Indians (after all, weren’t Indians God’s children too?) but because it would last and last” (144). It is the interminable boredom of Father Offstahd’s own (non)existence that allows him to assess Paul’s situation as “[q]uite worse than death” (145). For Paul, his presence on the reservation is marked by non-involvement, broken only one Halloween night when three children enter his house, not of their own will. After Little’s death in April, Paul heads north, yearning for something different, “believing that he knew about the spring, that he knew what he was leaving” (243). The narrator contends, however, that “[h]e never knew, because he left too soon” (243). He never knew what was *beneath* the ground, “the moss that ran to a depth of three feet and in all directions” (243), just as he never knew in depth the people he failed to serve for the past nine years. Paul and Treuer’s other priests never take the time and effort to listen to their people, a key factor to knowing them. They embody the message of white, colonial power that “communication. . . go[es] one way from the white Fathers to the Natives” (Roemer, E-mail, 15 Jan. 2008). Ironically, one of the most important roles of priests is that of confessor, which certainly requires listening. However, Treuer’s priests do not master this skill.

Finally, all of Treuer’s priests embody whiteness as frozen, blending into the background of northern Minnesota—cold, bleak, and lifeless. Their white lives are marked throughout the novel by imagery of water, whether frozen or flowing. The frigid landscape and the snow that suffocates Father Gundesohn correspond to the frozenness of the hearts of the priests. Whether

clean and purifying or dirty and sully, flowing water foregrounds the demise of this evil priest. Slipping on the dirty mop water that spilled on the floor, Father Gundesohn rapes Celia, then falls on the font of the cleansing holy water of baptism. The “living water” imagery of Christianity is reversed and defiled by these white priests, whom Treuer scathingly portrays.

Occasional reversals of Christianity are presented in novels of Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich, but never as bitterly as in Treuer. Priests, as well as nuns, perform whiteness in a variety of ways, from the sacred to the profane, as humans with faults as well as virtues. These writers, married for 23 years, discuss the degree of their collaboration in a 1985 interview: “Michael will have a draft and show me and we will talk it over, or I’ll have a draft, talk about the whole plan of it, characters out of it, just talk over every aspect of it” (Erdrich, qtd. in Coltelli 50). Dorris then adds, “We get to know the characters very well and talk about them and every situation. . . . And we edit it together. We go over every word and achieve consensus on every word” (50). Perhaps it is such collaboration that results in both of these authors’ diverse characterizations of priests and nuns in their works. In addition, with both writers of mixed-blood heritage, their portrayals of whiteness take on different “hues.”

In Dorris’s 1987 novel, *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, priests and nuns intrude upon the lives of all three narrators: Rayona, Christine, and Ida. Told in the order of the youngest narrator to the oldest, the tale unravels in reverse, with “Aunt” Ida’s story providing the missing pieces. With a “bad priest,” a “good priest,” and naïve nuns, each narrator’s life is indelibly marked by these white people of God.

Rayona’s narrative initiates the novel with her inner tensions of a mixed-blood heritage. Born of an African-American father and Indian mother, Rayona automatically becomes an

outsider in most social settings. Deposited on the reservation by her mother Christine, she is plunged into Aunt Ida's (Indian and missionized) world. Although Ida's worship involves listening to Mass on the radio, she insists that Rayona attend the Mission high school and the teen God Squad, led by Father Tom Novak. When this young priest appears, newly arrived at the Mission, he is described as "wearing a big beaded medallion that rides low on his black cassock" (41). Rayona decides that "[h]e's the kind that wants to be everybody's buddy, the kind they bring for guitar Masses" (41). As the plot progresses, Father Tom fulfills such negative first impressions and much, much more.

Rayona knows that after her first meeting with the God Squad teens, all of whom quickly disappear, she will "wind up Father Tom's favorite" and "special project" (45). He asks her to be his special assistant: "I really need you, Rayona," he says with a big wet smile" (47). Rayona doubts his sincerity, thinking, "He must count me for at least two of those three-hundred-day indulgences each Beatitude is worth" (47). However, she relents, since she has no other choice: "I admit I give in without a fight. Father Tom is the last one on the reservation I want to know, but he's the only who wants to know me. And he needs me more than he thinks" (47). Here, we get the first foreshadowing of what is to come.

Rayona notes that when they are alone, as often occurs at the God Squad meeting, Father Tom always "finds a way to talk about sex, which he calls 'The Wonders of the Human Body'" (48) and is quick to mention that he will answer any questions Rayona might have. Noting that "[i]t's clear that Father Tom is no expert himself, at least as far as girls are concerned, since all his examples have to do with boys" (48), Rayona does not know exactly how to respond to his question about (wet) dreams. When she realizes that he just wants her to describe her own



dreams about “The Wonders of the Human Body,” she refuses to play along. His words, however, penetrate her hardened, protective shell: “I can help you, Rayona. You need the guidance of an older friend. You have reached the age of puberty and are turning into a young lady. . . . An attractive young lady” (49). As Father Tom leaves in his truck, Rayona reflects: “It’s the first time since the day Mom split that I think I’m really going to lose it. Something rises inside me so hard I think it will lift me off the ground and ram me into the side of the house. . . . I know . . . that Father Tom can’t see me standing here, can’t know I’m caught by his words” (49-50).

When Father Tom offers to take Rayona to the Teens for Christ Jamboree in Helena, she indifferently accepts: “At least it’s somewhere away from here” (52). Father Tom is overjoyed: “‘We shall have a chance to *talk*,’ he says, and reaches out and pats me on the shoulder, then pulls his hand back. He’s trying hard” (53). Another attempt at personal touch occurs in the truck, described by Rayona as the two travel to the camp: “Father Tom puts his hand on top of mine where it rests on the car seat. Our hands lie there together for a minute, then he squeezes my fingers and lets go” (56-57). Rayona tries to ignore this act and “to keep his words, his moist skin, out of my head” (57).

The next episode of physical contact is staged by Father Tom, who simulates drowning as he swims to the yellow raft in the blue water of the camp, to join Rayona. “‘Holy Jesus,’ he says. ‘Rayona. It’s too cold. I’ve got a cramp’” (60). After she jumps in and tows him to the raft, he pulls her near, stating, “‘You have saved me’” (60). The next actions are detailed by Rayona:

“We are alone,” he says, and moves to line the length of his body against me. . . . He presses, presses, presses, and the air leaves my lungs. I want to sleep, to drown, to bore deep within the boards of the raft.

Father Tom has ducked his head, has closed his eyes tight. His hips jerk against me.

In my dream I move with him, pin him to me with my strong arms, search for his face with my mouth.

His body freezes. It turns to stone. I release my hold and we fall apart. I breathe. (60-61).

After this “encounter,” Father Tom becomes immediately penitent: “Rayona, we have experienced an occasion of sin. . . . I should never have gone in when I was so tired. I had no rest. You understand that? When we get back, we should forget this trip ever happened. It was a bad idea, something I should have foreseen” (61-62). When Rayona suggests that he leave her there so that she can go to Seattle to look up her dad, the priest willingly gives her money for the trip, along with his “beaded medallion he wears on the reservation, big and gaudy” (64). As she waits for the train, Rayona expresses her contentment: “I have the priest’s money and the whole night to think before morning comes. I’m happy without reason” (64).

An interesting sidelight to this entire slice of Rayona’s life appears in an early draft of Dorris’s novel, published in the 1986 publication, *The New Native American Novel: Works in Progress*. Here, he crafts Rayona as Raymond and includes similar scenes with Father Tom, but with homosexual innuendos. He takes Raymond on as his project, but here, he asks Ray to be his altar boy. When Ray reflects, “he needed me more than he thought” (“From *A Yellow Raft*”

95), the foreshadowing of the priest's needs conjure up different images from those in the novel. Raymond's response to the conversation concerning wet dreams and Father Tom's offer to provide "the guidance of an older man" (96) is quite different from that of Rayona. Unlike Rayona's ambivalence at her reaction to being called "attractive" for the first time in her life, Raymond experiences another kind of ambivalence: "Sometime that priest made me so nervous I wanted to run from him. . . And sometimes he was all right. When I did have questions he would answer me straight out, use grown-up words, not play around and make me feel stupid" (96). Later, when Father Tom asks Raymond to go camping with him, it is not to a jamboree, but it is for just the two of them: "'Tell you what,' he [Father Tom] said. 'Come this weekend I'm borrowing Father Hurlbert's pickup and taking you up to Flathead Lake. Just us. To camp'" (97-8). In the next paragraph, the narrator's words and thoughts are identical to those in the novel, with the exception of the final sentence: "At least it's somewhere away from here" (*A Yellow Raft* 52). Raymond, apparently, accepts without this final point, the deciding factor in Rayona's acceptance. The fact that there is no need for this rationale, even when the invitation is for a private, just-for-the-two-of-us camping trip, reinforces Raymond's ambivalence toward this lascivious priest.

The simulated drowning scene is almost identical in both works, but the outcome is, understandably, different. In the early draft, Raymond reflects on the yellow raft incident:

"You have saved me," he [Father Tom] said, and reaching his arm around me he drew me close. Our chests pressed together and I could feel the pound of his heart as the medal he wore bit into me. . . .

“We are alone,” he said, and moved to bring his body next to me. I felt him pressing, pressing, and I felt the breath leave my lungs. I wanted to sleep, to drown, to bore into the boards of the raft.

“Bless me, Father,” I said in my dream.

His body stiffened. A space opened between us and I drew in air. (“From *A Yellow Raft*” 103-04).

Father Tom, here, is as eager for Raymond to go as he is for Rayona, but with the former, he says nothing about his “sin.” He does state that this was “a bad idea” (104) and gladly gives Raymond money for the train. The chapter ends identically to the one in the novel, with Raymond feeling “happy without reason” (107).

Reasons for Dorris’s radical change in characters from his draft to his finished novel can only be speculated. In both cases, the priest certainly “sins” and fulfills stereotypes. However, in the late 1980s, perhaps the homosexuality of priests was a silenced stereotype, or at least, one which was not publicized as such acts are today.

Whatever the case, the change, interesting to note, affects the dynamics of the novel. The braided tales of three generations of women, to me, would not be as effective as those of two women and a male. In addition, the rodeo scene at the end would lose its flamboyance. Erdrich states that her favorite scene is “when she [Rayona] takes over for one of her cousins who is incapacitated, who can’t ride his horse in a rodeo, and she rides the horse” (qtd. in Coltelli 51). When Rayona wins “the hard-luck buckle, for the amazing feat of being bucked off the same horse three times in less than a minute” (Dorris, *A Yellow Raft* 121) and the judges see that she is

a girl, the cheering of the crowd gives Rayona her moment of glory. After all, it is the three narrators who “star” in the novel; Father Tom plays a subordinate role.

In addition to this “bad priest,” Dorris portrays a good one in Father Hurlbert. First glimpsed in the eyes of Rayona, who is surprised to hear him speak “our language” to Aunt Ida, Father Hurlbert is seen as “a short gray-haired man with blue eyes and a big stomach. His skin is weathered and tan against his wrinkled black suit” (38). Ida recalls her first introduction to this priest, when is sent for to help solve the problems of Clara’s pregnancy: “He was dark-haired and thin, with eyes so blue people wouldn’t look into them. In his first year on the reservation, he had gained a reputation for secrecy. He forgot the sins he heard in the box at the rear of the church” (310-11). He expresses his sympathy to Ida, who offers to go away with Clara and return with her baby, claiming it is Ida’s own. Father Hurlbert asks Ida, ““Are you willing to endure this sacrifice, to suffer the scorn of others, to care for this child as if it were you own, to keep this secret forever?”” (311). Hearing Ida’s affirmative answer, the priest states, “ ‘She is so young,’ ” to which Papa responds, ““It is our way”” (312). Ida, then, sees the priest as never before:

With this sentence Papa set the priest at a far distance, drew attention to the gulf that separated him from us, warned him from advice, put him at a disadvantage.

Father Hurlbert came back to me. There was a sadness about him, a lostness that made me wonder for the first time what he was doing here, an outsider, used but not wanted. I never thought of priests and nuns as living apart from the burdens they put on us. For a flash I saw the man within the priest and it

startled me. I forgot to turn away and we looked at each other, curious as two animals who drink from the same stream. (312)

Here is a beautiful, insightful portrayal of this white priest from an Indian's perspective; Ida sees him as a man, not merely a priest, with shared feelings and similar problems as all humankind, regardless of belief, vocation, or even race.

Later in the novel, however, when Father Hurlburt drives Ida home with her aunt Clara's baby, named Christine, he is portrayed stereotypically—as a drunk priest with his “empty pint of Old Crow” (321) in the car. Ida thinks, “I was glad to have a secret back on him, even not a very surprising one” (321). She is impressed, however, when he speaks to her in Indian and divulges that he has an Indian grandmother:

I closed my eyes and let my mind wander. I couldn't quite think of him as Indian, but knowing about that grandmother changed something. It made me less surprised about the night when he came to our house and listened to Clara's plan, when I noticed him as more than a priest. Now I had an explanation. (322)

Father Hurlbert turns out to be the only visitor Ida ever has since most mothers forbid their daughters to associate with such a woman in disgrace. The priest visits Ida every Thursday night, brings the Holy Sacrament to Ida's sick mother, helps Ida with her studies, practices her language, and plays with Christine. Both Ida and Father Hurlbert look forward to these visits. Also, he is the one who produces the falsified birth certificate claiming that Ida is the mother, when Clara wants to take the baby and give her to another family (336-37).

It is from Ida that Christine's birth and childhood are revealed. During the stay at the convent while waiting for Clara to give birth, Ida portrays the nuns as easily duped by Clara:

“The nuns in Denver were enraptured when they heard the story of Clara’s attack. She was a victim, they said, an innocent lamb, abused like a martyr by a rampaging beast of a man. . . . They overlooked the fact that Clara had not died” (314). Since this attacker is never revealed by Clara, “[e]ach nun was free to see him with her own eye, in her own, memory, in her own appallment” (314). They, however, see Ida as “everything those nuns expected an Indian to be” (315). The nuns, with Clara’s permission, name the baby Christine and give Ida her own name: “*Aunt Ida*” (317). When “Aunt Ida” insists upon seeing Christine, the nun named Vivencia is somewhat intimidated: “‘Do not raise your voice to me,’ she hissed, but I could see she would do what I wanted. I was a mystery to her, a danger, a wild Indian not at all like her gentle Clara” (317).

As Christine grows up on the reservation, she plunges “into the Catholic faith they fed her, clothed herself in its jewelry, and made it her own” (360). Ida is certain that she will “become one of those nuns who wear hair shirts and whip themselves with strips of rawhide” (260), so extreme is Christine’s piety. In school, she is taught by the nuns of “a letter the Blessed Virgin reputedly gave to a young girl named Lucy, in Portugal. . . . The letter is to be opened this coming New Year’s. . . . They say it will tell the future—the conversion of Russia through the intercession of the rosary, or the end of the world as we know it” (366-67). The promise of this letter changes Christine’s life, and she throws herself even more obsessively into her pious acts; she reads through the Apocalypse, and tells Ida that the world “will end in fire, and we must be ready. We have to wait on the roof for the Four Horsemen and be in a state of grace” (368). In addition, the nuns ask for money to send to those pagans in Russia and South America in need of conversion, and Christine gives her Christmas money for this cause. Ida

excoriates the nuns for their teachings: “This letter was a bad dream, a superstition the nuns concocted to control their students” (368). When New Year’s comes without its apocalypse, Christine loses her faith. From that time forward, she lives as she pleases, from man to man, from bottle of liquor to Percocet, until her liver and pancreas fail and she waits to die.

In his three-generational narrative, Michael Dorris juxtaposes a good priest, Father Hurlbert, with a bad one, Father Tom. Even this sexually abusive, superficially spiritual priest, however, manages to redeem himself somewhat in the novel. When Christine runs low on her Percocets as the pain worsens, she knows that the only way to get more would be to check herself into the Agency hospital. This, to her, is not an option: “Too many people I knew checked into the hospital and never came out, and I was happy where I was, where no machines measured my decline” (286). One day Father Tom appears on the doorstep with a new supply of the white pills and a promise for more whenever needed, as long as no one informs Father Hurlbert. Of course, this act of kindness could be interpreted as motivated merely by guilt, but, at least, it helps Christine. The nuns in the novel, however, although perhaps with good intentions, do nothing to help Christine; instead, they harm her and cause her to turn bitterly away from the faith that obsessed her during her youth.

Dorris has created three priests and a group of nuns, each embodying different messages of whiteness. Father Tom tries to conform at least in some superficial ways to the teens he serves; however, he manipulates them for his own needs or desires, as he does with Rayona. His hypocrisy, an unfortunate characteristic of many white Christians, is evident throughout even though he does reveal a scrap of compassion toward Christine. On the other hand, Father Hurlbert seeks to understand his people, especially Aunt Ida, as he becomes her only true friend.



He renounces white privilege and power, showing compassion, yet he displays another type of difference: Is he portrayed as benevolent because he is a mixed-blood? As for the nuns in the novel, those in Denver embody gullibility, allowing themselves to be swayed by Clara's looks and convincing lies, allowing superficiality to overrule spirituality. The other nuns, those entrusted in teaching on the reservation, exert destructive influences over Christine in using fear tactics and unsound teaching. They abuse the power over the children in their charge for their own pride and supposed needs. Thus, whiteness takes several forms, as do Christian attitudes and actions. Although Louis Owens is referring to Dorris's Indian characters in the novel, his assertion holds true for whites; Dorris succeeds in allowing them "to be human to escape from the deadly limitations of stereotyping" (218-19).

Nuns in Louise Erdrich's novels appear and interact with other characters, and, for the most part, play positive although often humorous roles. Jesuit priests and nuns infused themselves into Ojibwe life from the early eighteenth century on, as they set out to Christianize the Indians. Their efforts, whether resulting in successes or failures, became part of the fabric of tribal lives. Erdrich weaves these (white) people of God throughout her works, portraying them in a multitude of ways. Rarely one-dimensional, these holy ones exhibit complex, ever-changing qualities, beset with tensions, human needs, and frailties. Although the illustrious Father Damien and Sister Leopolda will culminate the final discussion of priests and nuns, some of Erdrich's other nuns merit consideration.

In *Love Medicine*, Sister Mary Martin de Porres, known to the other nuns at the Sacred Heart convent as an insomniac who plays her clarinet when having "one of her nights" (222). These nights are enjoyable to Sister Mary Martin, who goes to the sound-proofed sitting room to

play her music and sometimes even write out especially euphonious tunes. On one particular evening, she is surprised by what she thinks is a prowler, but is actually Gordie, coming to confess his murder of his wife June Morrissey. Although the nun states, “I’m not a priest” (225), Gordie persists in providing the particulars of his crime, which he has merely imagined in his drunken stupor. Sister Mary Martin, drowning in the graphic details, agrees to go see the body. When she gets to the car, she sees not a dead, bludgeoned woman at all, but a deer:

At the first sight of it, so strange and awful, a loud cackle came from her mouth. . . . But she had to believe. She bent into the car. Put her hands straight out, and lowered them carefully onto the deer. . . . [Then] the weeping broke her. It came out of her with a hard violence, loud in her ears, a wild burst of sounds that emptied her. (228)

After her implied administering of last rites to the dead deer, Sister Mary Martin is overcome with emotion. She hears Gordie’s wailing in the morning light and chases him, but he escapes into the woods.

Sister Mary Martin is summoned again in *Love Medicine*, this time by Lipsha Morrissey. Motivated to create a love medicine for his adoptive parents Marie and Nector Kashpaw, Lipsha fails in killing geese to get their needed hearts. Rationalizing to himself that it is faith that makes love medicine work rather than the actual ingredients, Lipsha buys two frozen turkeys and uses their hearts. First, however, to bolster the faith, he seeks “official blessings from the priest” (246). Father Damien, too busy to help, sends Lipsha to Sister Mary Martin, who is said to be “the kindest-hearted of the Sisters up the hill” (247). When she asks Lipsha what he wants her to bless, he responds honestly. When she hesitates, Lipsha reflects: “Kindhearted though she

was, I began to sweat. A person could not pull the wool down over Sister Martin. I stumbled through my mind for an explanation, quick, that wouldn't scare her off" (247). Lipsha then states that the hearts are to insure the crowning of the first Indian saint, Kateri Tekakwitha. The shrewd nun sees through this lie, however, and when she hears that the hearts are really for love medicine, she thinks the medicine is for Lipsha. Her heart goes out to him, and she tells him that her "blessing won't make any difference anyway" (248), but that he just needs to be himself. This kind-hearted nun is willing to help her people, no matter how peculiar their requests may seem. Refusing to force her own Christian principles on the people she serves, Sister Mary Martin seeks more to understand than to be understood. Different from Dorris's Denver nuns, she refuses to fall prey to Lipsha's tricks and bless the turkey hearts. Her heart goes out to Lipsha, as it does to Gordie, and this white nun embodies messages of hope for white/Indian relations to be improved by whites' understanding, compassion, and respect.

Another nun, Sister Hildegarde, plays a frequent role in Erdrich's *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, which inscribes the tribe's history from 1912 through 1997. Here can be found elaborations on events occurring in several other of Erdrich's novels. This so-called "last report" is told by an omniscient narrator as Father Damien recalls his own life with this North Dakota tribe of Anishinaabeg. When the priest arrives at the reservation, it is Mother Superior Hildegarde Anne who instructs Father Damien to these people he comes to serve. Described as "a woman of German resourcefulness," Sister Hildegarde "had saved her sisters, as well as many others, early on that winter by ordering the church horse butchered while it still had flesh, and distributing its store of oats and grain. She had a toughness of expression unusual in a

nun, and spoke bluntly” (70). Her strong character and no-nonsense words prompt her to direct Father Damien as to what he needs to do, painting a vivid picture of the people:

“Father,” said Hildegarde, “you must go visiting with the sacrament. The poor Indians are dying out. Now is a good time to convert them! They live like wretches anyway, and then the sweating fever takes them. Some are gone in only hours once the illness sets in, so you must be quick. Some wait for death to walk down the road. They just sit patiently, singing, drumming, and prepare to get sick. You could easily baptize them while they’re tranced.” (70-1)

Although Father Damien is unconvinced as to this particular method of conversion, he asks Sister Hildegarde to show him everything she knows about the place, and she does. Giving him a “tour” using the reservation map, she provides the background of the tribe, including “a stubborn girl, an old man” (73), about whom she warns Father Damien:

“The older man is a stubborn, crafty, talkative sort, much resistant to conversion. The vile things he says, the reprobate!” (73). This “reprobate” turns out to be Nanapush, the priest’s closest friend, and the “stubborn girl” is Fleur Pillager. To Sister Hildegarde, Nanapush is “too tricky to die,” and Fleur is “the daughter of Satan” (73); thus, they are practically beyond hope (or conversion, at least).

Sister Hildegarde is involved in numerous aspects of the novel that play into the plot. In acting out her “belief that good penmanship was the defining key to success in life” (169), she teaches Nector Kashpaw to write, a skill that allows him to manipulate land documents and to trick Bernadette Morrissey at her own “game.” It is Sister Hildegarde who insists on keeping the piano that was sent to the nuns, to the dismay of Father Damien. Moreover, she is the one to

insist on a statue of the Virgin Mary to complement this wonderful instrument. However, when the statue arrives, “as soon as her eyes and nose and lips came clear, she startled, she fascinated, she elicited some repugnance” (226), and Hildegarde commands that she be sent back. Met with Father Damien’s strong resistance, however, the nun concedes: “‘I suppose there is a lesson in this.’ Hildegarde’s voice was a bit sour. She narrowed her eyes at the statue, suspicious. The snake that writhed beneath the Virgin’s feet not only was too realistic, but did not look at all crushed down by her weight” (226). This “lesson” appears in numerous guises throughout the novel, not the least of which is in Erdrich’s “ultimate” nun, Pauline Puyat/Sister Leopolda. It is Sister Hildegarde who rescues Pauline from her episode on the boat (as discussed in Chapter 2) and hides “the extent of her strange condition” (127).

As Hildegarde continues the demanding and troublesome task of nursing Pauline back to health, the nun becomes determined that this postulant will recover but not for beneficent reasons. As the people visit Pauline with various “cures,” they also spread the word of her holiness and bring their sick to be healed by her. These antics provoke Sister Hildegarde: “Who, did the people outside think, who took care of these holy martyrs, these self-indulgent saints? She could tell them, she knew. She struck her chest, an act for which she was immediately contrite. Still, it was true” (129-30). In her portrayals of this white nun, Erdrich shows Sister Hildegarde as human, with her own struggles and “un-Christian” thoughts as she strives to serve sinners, saints, and all those in between.

Erdrich’s “ultimate” nun, as mentioned above, is Pauline Puyat, who, though born a mixed-blood, claims to be white. As noted before, in *Tracks*, Pauline states, “I wanted to be like my mother, who showed her half-white” (14). Later, when she enters the convent and

encounters Christ-on-the-Stove, she imagines His telling her that she is “not one speck of Indian but wholly white” (137). Indeed, her whiteness was important, as noted by Nancy Peterson:

Pauline’s desire to be ‘wholly white’ is understandable in the light of the discrimination that the Catholic Church practiced in nineteenth-century North Dakota. Valerie Sherer Mathes points out that Native American women were not allowed to join religious orders until the latter part of the century, when separate sisterhoods for Native American women were founded. (1992, n19)

In addition to the fact that nuns needed to be white, Pauline takes on whiteness to align herself to the superior race: “[E]ven as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us. I would not speak our language” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 14). Thus, Pauline views whiteness as a necessary attribute to gain power and success, buying into the postcolonialist idea of the superiority of the dominant (colonizing) race. In short, she imagines herself to be white.

The idea of imagining a self, an identity, has been articulated by N. Scott Momaday, in “Man Made of Words”: “If there is any absolute assumption in back of my thoughts tonight, it is this: We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and *that* we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined” (87). Momaday is referring to American Indians, who, after generations of mixing with their white colonizers, have lost a sense of identity. Regardless of blood quantum or tribal rolls, mixed-blood Indians are free to imagine themselves as they choose. Erdrich, with her own creative “twist,” has Pauline imagine herself as white. Of course, Pauline cannot be “truly” white, but fits Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry: “almost

the same, *but not quite*” (86). In fact, Pauline Puyat/Sister Leopolda, in imagining herself “wholly white,” could be an apt illustration for Bhabha’s colonial mimicry.

A problem of mimicry, according to Bhabha, is exactly this: the colonial subject, although attempting to fit into the mold of the dominant culture, will maintain some degree of difference. Indeed, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*” (86). Although the colonizers desire their subjects to become (almost) like them, they also know that if subjects were *exactly* like their masters, the domination would cease. The colonized would become powerful enough to overthrow their colonizers. Thus, the ambivalence “does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence. By ‘partial’ I mean both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual’” (86). Pauline is such an “incomplete” and “partial” mimic of a white nun. Therefore, she must exert herself more than other nuns, who are “real,” rather than “virtual”; in short, she must become the ultimate nun, a “supernun,” which she attempts to be throughout her life.

In *Tracks*, while Pauline is working her way toward becoming a nun, we see her obsession with taking care of the dying, as well as her unusual, self-inflicted forms of penance. She wears her shoes on the wrong feet to remind her of “Christ’s last journey . . . His bare feet on the cobbled stones, and the nail holes through them” (146). She tells Nanapush, “I suffer for His sake as He did for yours. . . . I miswear my shoes for mortification” (146). In addition, she wears a hairshirt: “I had made a set of underwear from potato sacks, and when I wore it the chafing reminded me of Christ’s sacrifice” (143). Her “most secret practice,” however, is to

relieve herself only two times a day: “No one noticed in the convent. No one reported, as they had when I left the pins in my headpiece and when I wore a short length of rope around my neck, reminding me not to betray my Lord as Judas had” (147). Indeed, she must keep these practices secret because, as she notes, “Superior discouraged my unusual penances” (146). One of her final, pre-nun acts in *Tracks* occurs when she takes “Nanapush’s leaky old boat [and] ventures out on to Lake Machimanito. Practically the entire cast of *Tracks* assembles on the shore” (Roemer, “They Talk” 10). Disregarding all rescue attempts by Father Damien and Nanapush, Pauline decides that they are “evil tempters. Echoing Christ, she tells Nanapush, ‘Get thee behind me’” (11). Determined to overcome Satan, whom she conjoins in her mind with the lake creature and Napoleon Morrissey, she vows “to suffer in the desert forty days, forty nights. . . . to wait for . . . [her] tempter. . . . to transfix him with the cross” (Erdrich, *Tracks* 200). However, it turns out to be Napoleon Morrissey that the “transfixes with the cross,’ strangling him with her rosary. After murdering Napoleon, she strips herself naked, rolls “in dead leaves, in moss, in defecation of animals” (203), and literally crawls back to the convent. From her own tale, the time between that event and her becoming a bride of Christ was a few months, during which her sisters ministered to her. She omits the tremendous burden she placed on the other nuns, as recounted by Sister Hildegard in *Last Report*, a burden that was never truly lifted.

Pauline-turned-Sister Leopolda appears in *The Beet Queen*, on hand to photograph the “miracle” of Christ’s face on the ice where Mary Adare falls. In recounting this event, Celestine tells that Leopolda’s photograph of the face and the account appear “in the catechism textbooks throughout the Midwest” (42). However, Celestine notes a little-known fact: “The one thing they never write about is how Sister Leopolda is found several nights after Mary’s accident. She



is kneeling at the foot of the slide with her arms bare, scourging herself past the elbows with dried thistles, drawing blood. After that she is sent somewhere to recuperate” (42). This chapter, dated 1932, reveals that Leopolda is still attempting to mimic Christ by forcing physical suffering and shedding her own blood.

Sister Leopolda becomes the focus of Marie Lazarre’s visits to the convent in *Love Medicine*. Marie, the secret child of Pauline and Napoleon Morrissey, is, in her youth, determined to become a nun: “I was going up there on the hill with the black robe women. They were not any lighter than me. I was going there to pray as good as they could” (43). Marie hears that “the Sacred Heart Convent was a catchall place for nuns that can’t get along elsewhere. Nuns that complain too much or lose their mind” (45). She wonders where they got Sister Leopolda, whose difference appeals to Marie: “I had this confidence in Leopolda. She was different. The other Sisters had long ago gone blank and given up on Satan. He slept for them. They never noticed his comings and goings. But Leopolda kept track of him and knew his habits, minds he burrowed in, deep spaces where he hid” (45). In addition to her “big stark bony nose. . . for smelling out brimstone and evil thoughts” (46), Leopolda has a “hook-pole” used ostensibly for opening high windows, but in actuality, according to Marie, “for catching Satan by surprise” (46). When Leopolda “hooks” Satan as he enters Marie’s heart, the nun says, “He *wants* you. . . That’s the difference. I give you love” (48).

As it turns out, however, Leopolda’s “love” is shown by physical abuse; she pours boiling water in Marie’s ear to burn Satan out of her, stabs her hand with a fork, and knocks her out with a hot poker. To explain this event to the Sisters, Leopolda invents a tale of guile, which she recounts to Marie: ““I have told my Sisters of your passion. . . How the stigmata. . . the

marks of the nails. . . appeared in your palm and you swooned at the holy vision” (59). Marie, however, knows the truth, that “Leopolda had saved herself with her quick brain. She had witnessed a miracle” (59). With this knowledge of the nun’s subterfuge, Marie realizes her own power over Leopolda. However, she makes the mistake of seeing Leopolda “kneeling there. . . [w]ith the desperate eyes drowning in the deep wells of her wrongness” (60), and Marie feels pity for her. Realizing that she is “caught,” Marie’s power over the nun diminishes. Although she cannot resist saying, ““Receive the dispensation of my sacred blood”” (60), Marie’s heart is not in the words; she feels “[n]o joy when she [Leopolda] bent to touch the floor” (60). The fleeting sense of power felt by Marie shifts with her pity, and Leopolda regains her power as “almost white” colonizer carrying the message of Christianity.

Years later (1957), hearing that Sister Leopolda is dying, Marie reflects on the old nun’s life. She knows that Leopolda “had gone steadily downhill” having to resort to “canes, chairs, confinement” (147). Many believed that the nun was a saint and went to her to be blessed, but Marie knows the truth about Sister Leopolda:

She had to pray harder than the others because the Devil still loved her far better than any on that hill. She walked the sorrowful mysteries one year with bloody feet. . . . But I hadn’t seen her visiting the sick nor raising the sad ones up. No everyday miracles for her. Her talent was the relishment of pain, foaming at the mouth. (147)

Despite her memories from the convent, Marie decides to take her daughter Zelda and visit the aged nun one more time. She notes the scene of Leopolda lying in bed, where “the bed sheets [were] so white they almost glowed,” where the nun blends in, “a small pile of sticks wrapped in

a white gown,” whose “hair was pure white” (151-52). The spoon that Leopolda uses to beat on the bedstead “to drive away spirits” (147) becomes a symbol of power to Marie, who tries to wrest from her old nemesis: “I wanted that spoon because it was a hell-claw welded smooth. It was the iron poker that she’d marked me with” (156). After a physical, as well as emotional (and perhaps spiritual) struggle, however, Marie surrenders the spoon and notes, “There was nothing I could do after hating her all these years” (158). Sister Leopolda still displays a strength that “was the strict progress of darkness” (158); however, Marie knows that the nun’s strength had always been “a kind of perverse miracle, for she got it from fasting herself thin. Because of this hunger practice her lips were a wounded brown and her skin a deadly pale” (49). Thus, throughout her life, Sister Leopolda has not ceased from acting out her “super-powers,” increasing in physical whiteness as she wallows in her self-ascribed position of the “ultimate” white nun. No Sister of the convent exceeds Leopolda in her acts of self-flagellation, acts which reveal her own skewed mimicry of Christ.

Apparently, however, Sister Leopolda is nowhere near death at the time of Marie’s visit in 1957. It is not until Erdrich’s *Tales of Burning Love*, in a chapter dated 1994, that we read of this 108-year-old nun’s demise. Jack Mauser, son of Awun and Mary Kashpaw, grandson of Fleur Pillager and John James Mauser, witnesses and even plays a role in Leopolda’s end. One of Jack’s ex-wives, Eleanor, is staying at the convent, studying the life of Leopolda, who just might become the “[f]irst mixed-blood saint” (42). Having gone to the garden to meet Jack, Eleanor encounters Leopolda, who has gone there to pray to the pedestal on which would rest the new statue of the Virgin Mary. Although as a young girl, Pauline/Leopolda renounced her Chippewa heritage and language in her desire to be white, in the garden she resorts to her old

language when asking God to hear her prayer: ““Day wi kway ikway!”” (53). Her next words to Him are to “[e]nd this torment” (53). These words are the ones that seem to “break through” to Leopolda’s God because after uttering them, she witnesses another of her so-called miracles. As she looks up at the missing statue of the Virgin Mary (which is actually Jack hiding behind honeysuckle branches he is holding), it seems that “the virgin leaned down off her pedestal, and ever so gently, as Leopolda stretched out her fingers, transferred the carved bundle she carried into the cradle of the nun’s arms” (53). This action gives Leopolda “surpassing peace” (53), as though, in being given back her abandoned baby, she has been finally forgiven. She then swoons with ecstasy and dies, left by Eleanor and Jack in the garden to be discovered by the nuns. Soon afterwards, however, lightning strikes, and Leopolda’s body is “reduced to a pile of ash in the shape of a cross” (63), at least according to some of the nuns. Others believed that Leopolda had wandered off. However, “[t]he surrounding fields were searched with no success, but that was no proof, either, that she wasn’t somewhere, alive or dead” (63). Still others of the community believed her body had been “vaporized by the electrical blast. . . . [and] there were those who saw a new miracle in this disappearance,” perhaps even an “*assumption*” (63). Whatever the “truth,” the enigmatic exit of Leopolda from the scene serves to add to her mystique.

Interestingly, one of the most positive results of Sister Leopolda’s life occurs later in the novel when Eleanor is lost in a blizzard and sees a vision of the nun. Sister Leopolda seems to have finally learned the lesson of the Cross. She speaks to Eleanor of the many facets of love, including “the love a child bears its mother, its father, [the love] a parent bears its child. It is a love that is no other thing but pure salvation, and by it, Christ’s balancing trick was inspired and foretold” (370). Continuing, Leopolda states that “we have no need of tricks. We are held upon

the cross by our own desires” (371-72). She then tells Eleanor to “pull forth the nails” (372), thus, to free herself from being held upon the cross. For Pauline/Leopolda’s life, she had focused on “the nails,” the pain, the suffering, and the penance she felt were required of a “bride” of Christ. She had neglected the forgiveness, redemption, and love, the true fruits of Christianity. Her “own desires,” prompted by her pride, had held her upon the cross. These vainglorious desires became obsessions to be white, to be a “supernun,” to be a saint. Pauline/Leopolda lived out these obsessions to the extent of abandoning her own child, murdering the child’s father, and repressing her thoughts and actions. It is only at the end of her life, in the garden (ironically, analogous to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ prayed “Not My will, but Thine”), that Leopolda humbles herself, asking God to hear her prayer—in Chippewa. He does, and from the vision of the Virgin’s giving back her child, Leopolda experiences redemption. Unfortunately, it is too late for her partial Christianity to be made complete; she remains merely a mimic, never experiencing the love that could have been found if *she* had only “pulled forth the nails.”

Perhaps Pauline/Leopolda embodies whiteness at its worst. Not being born into the “*unearned advantage and conferred dominance*” (McIntosh 126) of white privilege, Pauline must work hard to earn it and confer it upon herself. Such a feat is certainly difficult, if not impossible, and is fraught with obstacles from all sides. Placing herself in a position of (white) power, this “supernun” must inevitably fall short and resort to mere mimicry. Yet, amazingly, Sister Leopolda is being considered for sainthood in Erdrich’s *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little Not Horse*. Speculating on Erdrich’s messages concerning Catholicism, Peter Beidler, calls this nun a “lying, self-aggrandizing, blackmailing, child-beating murderer” and asks this

critical question: “What does it say of the Catholic hierarchy that it sponsors an investigation to see if she is holy enough to be canonized?” (145). Beidler adds this question to many more as he explores Erdrich’s portrayals of the priests in this final novel to be discussed.

Erdrich’s Agnes/Father Damien, truly exhibits the many facets of love that Sister Leopolda could only mimic. Despite her/his duplicity, shortcomings, and sins, Agnes/Father Damien portrays vividly Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity rather than mimicry. This priest can be seen as analogous to Renée Green’s stairwell in *Sites of Genealogy*, upon which Bhabha expounds:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designation of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. . . . This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (4).

From Agnes DeWitt to Sister Cecilia, and finally to Father Damien, the life of Erdrich’s ultimate priest revealed in *The Last Report on the Miracles at little No Horse*, can be viewed as an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” of gender, religion, and race. The beloved priest of the Anishnaabe tribe in North Dakota “entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy,” and deeply loves these people she/he was called to serve.

The “connective tissue” of love directs the life of Agnes/Cecilia/Damien. Surely it is her love of Christ that drives her to the convent, but it is her passion for music that keeps her there: “She not only taught but lived music, existed for those hours when she could be concentrated in her being—which was half music, half divine light, only flesh to the degree she could not admit

otherwise” (14). However, when “her passion for the bride of Christ” (14) becomes overpowered by her passion for Chopin, she leaves the convent. Her next love, Berndt Vogel, indulges her and allows her to buy a Caramacchione, which she plays naked. Her passion for Chopin becomes fulfilled in her physical relationship with Berndt, but that is ended with an actor/robber/killer, whose bullet wounds Agnes. Surviving both the wound and a flood, Agnes finds herself in a hut, being sheltered and nourished by a man described as “sheer kindness” (42), whose body warms her throughout the night. In the morning, discovering herself alone in a hovel, she realizes what has happened: “Though You, in You, with You. Aren’t those beautiful words? For of course she knew her husband long before she met Him, long before He rescued her, long before He fed her broth and held Agnes close to Him through that quiet night” (43). In one of Father Damien’s letters to the Pope, written many years later, he reveals his heart:

*Since then, through the years, my love and wonder have steadily increased.  
Having met Him just that once, having known Him in a man’s body, how could I  
not love Him until death? How could I not follow Him? Be thou like as me, were  
His words, and I took them literally to mean that I should attend Him as a loving  
woman follows her soldier into the battle of life, dressed as He is dressed,  
suffering the same hardships. (43-44)*

The opportunity to take on the identity of the first Father Damien, who died in the flood on his way to missionize some Indians, presents itself, and Agnes/Father Damien is reborn. Binding her breasts and putting on the dead Father Damien’s clothing, the new priest begins “to walk north, into the land of the Ojibwe, to the place on the reservation where he had told her he was bound” (45).

Although the second Father Damien's mission begins somewhat serendipitously, he plunges into the job wholeheartedly, immediately attempting the Ojibwe language to better communicate with his new people. In addition, he immerses himself into the culture, beliefs, and antics of this tribe, unlike many whites who tried to civilize the Indians. David Murray, in *Forked Tongues*, claims that for many of these whites, communication was attempted by making the Indians learn English, rather than the other way around; thus, there was no effective "cultural translation" (5). Citing Ulli Bitterli, who examines the failures of many Jesuit missions, Murray notes: "[T]he real task [of translation] was to trace the complex ties between the Indian word and its entire cultural background. The missionaries would have had to adjust their conceptual language to this cultural framework, even at the considerable risk of distorting the very essence of their message" (5). Father Damien does just that; he writes in one of his papal letters: "*I have learned something of the formidable language of my people, and translated catechism as well as specific teachings. I have also rendered into English certain points of their own philosophy that illuminate the precious being of the Holy Ghost*" (Erdrich, *Last Report* 48-49). He concludes that "[t]he ordinary as well as esoteric forms of worship engaged in by the Ojibwe are sound, even compatible with the teachings of Christ" (49). Thus, from this letter, we glimpse the possibilities of Bhabha's "hybridity of imagined communities" (5). Father Damien carries out Bhabha's "borderline work of culture [that] demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation" (7). Although Bhabha is generally referring to the minority culture, Erdrich reinscribes her ultimate white priest, Father Damien, so that he acts like the minority,



assimilating into their culture, rather than demanding the opposite: “I am sent here, thought Agnes, to accept and to absorb. I shall be a thick cloth” (74).

One of the first friends that Father Damien makes is Nanapush, who was said to survive “marginally in the bush somewhere” (77). Braving the elements as well as the arduous journey, the priest ventures forth to meet this “reprobate” (73). Father Damien finds a skeletal man, who has obviously suffered unspeakable loss, yet who has his wits and wiles and proceeds to carry out his own mission, which is “to shock the priest” (82). Nanapush’s attempts are unsuccessful, however, even though he tells Damien bawdy tales and tries to get the priest to intervene in the affairs of Old Kashpaw, with his many wives. Acting out of love and understanding, rather than legalism, Father Damien accepts Kashpaw as he is, stating that since “Kashpaw does not belong to the Church” (94), the doctrine of one wife is not binding. A lively discussion concerning hell, purgatory, and Christianity follows, with Father Damien carefully answering every question non-judgmentally, surprising his listeners. When asked by Old Kashpaw, “[W]hat makes you walk behind this Jesus?” (99), the priest replies, “It is love. . . That is the sole reason. Love” (99). It is this love that intrigues Nanapush, having never experienced it from a “chimookomanag” (94) before; he and Father Damien become fast friends, confiding in each other, fully trusting each other, and never attempting to “convert” the other. Near the end of his life, Father Damien states:

“I loved Nanapush . . . . The old man was my teacher, my confidant, my priest’s priest, my confessor, my friend . . . . There is no one I want to visit except in the Ojibwe heaven, and so at this late age I’m going to convert . . . and become at

long last the pagan that I always was at heart before I was Cecilia, when I was just Agnes, until I was seduced and diverted by the music of Chopin.” (310)

Through the depth of love that Damien shows toward Nanapush, the priest finds himself more willing to accept the old reprobate’s religious beliefs than his own.

Father Damien also acts out his profound love toward Mary Kashpaw, who, in her grief from the violent deaths of her family members, is found digging furiously in the earth. Rather than trying “to remonstrate with her or ask questions, Father Damien took up a shovel. Alongside the huge mad child, where no one would go, he then began to dig” (115). The priest carries out one of the missions of Christianity, to walk alongside those in need. In doing so, he models servanthood, which Mary Kashpaw then takes on, becoming his good and faithful servant throughout his life. She spends her days (except for the 10 years with Awun and their child, Jack Mauser) selflessly serving her beloved priest and keeping his secret to the end. As she often does, walking “before the priest, thrashing through the slough grass” (123), on one particular day she becomes transformed in Father Damien’s eyes. He suddenly sees her as Christ, who has been his “constant companion,” going before him throughout his life, “stamping down snow” and carrying him “through sloughs. . . . breaking the trail” (123). This vision gives the priest “[a]n amazed strength” (123) and a renewed vision of his ministry; again, the reciprocity of love proves to be salvation both for Father Damien and for one of his “flock.”

Another of the many facets of love that Father Damien experiences occurs with a visiting priest, Father Gregory. Each feels a chemistry drawing them together sexually, regardless of the consequences. They confess their sins to each other, listing each separately, along with a few “bad” sins they have not committed. As time passes, however, Agnes/Father Damien realizes

that she/he cannot continue this subterfuge; the priest's love for her/his people is too strong. When Father Gregory proposes that they leave the priesthood, marry, and have a secular life, Agnes/Damien refuses: "I am a priest. . . . This is what I do. Without it, if I couldn't say the Mass. . . ' She held her hands out, tough with work and empty. Nothing" (206-08). Upon Gregory's departure, Agnes/Father Damien suffers the most severe struggles concerning her/his identity, a struggle much like that of demon possession. In a letter to the "*Fountain of Hope*," Father Damien confesses this fear of possession: "*No doubt, were the leaders of my diocese to learn of my condition, I would be yanked from my post straight into a sanatorium*" (208). Yet, the priest asserts that "*not only am I certain that would do no good, but I also cannot, just not, will not, desert my people here*" (208). What follows is a statement of Father Damien's own particular mission, built from his love and empathy for his people: "*Many of the Indians . . . have come to depend upon me. There is really no one else I feel can take my place, no one so committed to their well-being or engrossed in their faith—I am becoming one with them so as to better lead them into the great Corpus Christi. And the closer I draw, the more of their pain do I feel*" (208-09).

In his attempt to rid himself of this torment of Gregory's departure, Agnes/Father Damien procures various drugs, "the means either to cure the pain or to put herself to sleep forever" (210). The drugs help the priest to survive the anguish while carrying out the priestly duties for a time, but when he does not appear for Mass, Sister Hildegard goes to check on him. Although uncertain whether he is sleeping or dead, she prays for the former and leaves his cabin. Mary Kashpaw then enters and refuses to leave; she stays "day and night. . . keeping watch" (211) and keeping his lamp going. Father Damien, "lying inert," is described during her persistent vigil:

Father Damien was, in truth, wandering mightily through heaven and earth. He was exploring worlds inhabited by both Ojibwe and Catholic. And had Mary Kashpaw not kept that beacon going, he might, in his long and rambling journey, have become confused or even got lost. For the countries of the spirit, to which he was now admitted, were accessible only via many dim and tangled trails. (211)

It is Mary Kashpaw who goes in after Father Damien and brings him back from these “tangled trails.” He then visits his friend Nanapush on whom he feels free to bare his own soul and ask for advice. Nanapush prepares a sweat lodge for the priest and prays over him, “addressing the creator of things and all beings to every direction” (214). The priest surrenders to the peace and comfort gained from this experience. Although knowing that “[a]ccording to Church doctrine, it was wrong for a priest to undertake God’s worship in so alien a place” (214), Father Damien questions how this could be so when he feels “the luxuriant stretching of an utterly relaxed spirit” (215). Having suffered from forsaking Agnes’s passionate love for Gregory, Father Damien is healed, not through Sister Hildegarde’s prayers, but through Mary Kashpaw’s devotion and Nanapush’s Ojibwe ceremony.

The healing allows Father Damien to return from his despair, to experience his own resurrection, his own forgiveness, all possible because of love. In addition, the priest realizes why he has been called to this mission in the first place—to impart forgiveness to others. Seeing “that forgiveness as a long, slow, soaking he had caused to fall on the dry hearts of sinners,” Father Damien draws strength from this knowledge: He “had forgiven everyone, right and left, of all mistakes and shameful sins. All except for Nanapush, who had never really confessed to any sin, but had instead forgiven Damien with great kindness for wronging him and all of the

people he had wanted to help, forgiven him for stealing so many souls” (309-10). Thus, forgiveness, as well as love, is a reciprocal act and is the “connective tissue” that binds this priest to his people. When juxtaposing the lives of the two “saints,” Leopolda and Damien, major differences can be discerned as both attempt to live out their concepts of Christianity. Sister Leopolda concentrates on Christ’s suffering and crucifixion, while Father Damien emphasizes the redemption and forgiveness accomplished through the resurrection. Although both events are crucial to Christianity, it is the resurrection that promises new life.

If Sister Leopolda embodies whiteness at its worst, Father Damien embodies whiteness at its best. Certainly suffering from her/his own past indelibly marked by tragedy and loss, this white priest overcomes the past in selfless dedication to serving others. Never shirking physical labor, such as digging in the dirt with Mary Kashpaw, Father Damien does whatever is needed to act in humility and show what true Christianity should be. Never judgmental of the un-Christian practices, this priest finds ways to answer even Nanapush’s trick questions, so that the two become the best of friends for life. Always willing to listen with an open mind, yet beset with contradictions and with emotional and spiritual struggles, this priest embodies the ideal of whiteness: to live the best we can in regards to others, despite all differences and shortcomings. Beidler asks these questions concerning the assessment of Father Damien’s life:

Are we concerned that by performing a series of illegal marriages, and last rites and by illegally hearing confessions and easily absolving sinners, Father Damien is endangering his people’s immortal souls? Or is the easy forgiveness Father Damien practices meant to be an example to the rest of us that we should all be

ready to forgive not only our own worst secret sins but also the worst sins of others? (145).

I would answer with an emphatic “No” to the first question and a wholehearted “YES” to the second.

All of the nuns and priests portrayed in these novels were initially called or sent to spread Christianity among the “uncivilized” Natives. In the process, these (white) people of God acted out their missions in various ways, some falling prey to their own inner struggles, some merely condescending to these “inferior” people, some accepting their own calling as a tedious chore, a way of bearing their own Cross. With the pride and privilege of whiteness, added to their religious zeal and the civilizing mission, these “saints” sometimes failed to act out the humility and servanthood that they preached. These are the nuns and priests that fit into the stereotypes often ascribed to those in their positions. However, also in these novels, we see true and faithful “saints” whose highest calling is to bring the gospel to others and to model their Lord in doing so. The American Indian authors of these works, having known or heard of such “saints,” both false and faithful, portray them in a multitude of ways. Not stopping with stereotypes, some of these writers look at the heart of these whites before judging the person, a true Christian concept. They recognize that all are humans fraught with frailties, and the effectiveness of their ministries can be measured by the degree of love and compassion they have for their people. Love is the key—selfless, unconditional, forgiving, restoring love—which only the faithful know how to impart.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This I believe has always been the true and real vision of Indigenous People of the Americas: to love, respect, and be responsible to ourselves and others, and to behold with passion and awe the wonders and bounty and beauty of creation and the world around us.

Simon Ortiz, *Woven Stone*

In his introduction to *Woven Stone*, Simon Ortiz (Acoma) articulates the qualities of his People, which are often borne out in their literature. Even whites are portrayed respectfully as many American Indian writers probe beneath the skin, seeking to understand the legacies of colonialism. Certainly, this does not hold true for all white characters, such as David Treuer's priests in *Little*, who fall under the category of one-dimensional stereotypes. Also, numerous writers discussed here create self-centered, materialistic, and superior-acting whites; however, these writers often go beyond such negative stereotypes and evince acceptance, if not respect, for many of the white characters portrayed in their literary works.

Roy H. Pearce, in his Postscript to the 1988 republication of his 1953 work, *Savagism and Civilization*, proposes what he would do if he were to rewrite this *Study of the Indian and the American Mind*. One such revision would be to "emphasize the fact. . . that white understanding in the Indian was in crucial part derived from a conflation of all Indians, tribes and subtribes, into one: *the Indian*" (254-55). From my own study, I have attempted to show that Indians have not



made this error in their understanding of whites; on the contrary, there is no unified notion of *the white* in their literature, even that of the nineteenth-century nonfiction writers discussed in Chapter One. Apess, Copway, Winnemucca, Eastman, and Zitkala-Ša have all distinguished subsets of whites in their encounters, regardless of tragic contexts. Silko, Erdrich, and Hogan build upon this tradition of distinguishing “good” from “bad” whites in their fictional portrayals, also including “good” and “bad” Indians, as shown in Chapter Two. Writers in Chapter Three, from McNickle and Mathews in the early twentieth century, through Momaday, Silko, Erdrich, Dorris, Hogan, Alexie, Sarris, and Treuer, portray individual white characters in complex, fluid, and multi-dimensional ways. Finally, as shown in Chapter Four, portrayals of white nuns and priests reveal that American Indian writers move beyond the embodiment of whiteness in Christianity as noted by Richard Dyer in *White*. Instead, these Christian emissaries and servants become the most complicated and fascinating white characters of all.

Another of Pearce’s proposals is the opposite of his own project: “a study of the Indian image of the white as it has become a means of his developing an image of himself, a study of the idea of Civilization as it at once has been introjected into the Indian psyche and helped to shape it” (255). As a result of this call from Pearce, I have endeavored to accomplish “a study of the Indian image of the white.” My own focus, however, has not been to determine the influences on the Indian’s “image of himself,” but, rather, to expose whiteness in all of its implicit invisibility and masked power and privilege. In his work on whiteness, Dyer demands that we “see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place, and end its rule” (4). In my study, I, too, seek to displace whiteness, but rather than viewing whites within white cultural representations, I have used Pearce’s suggested context of American

Indians' representations of whites. Of course, the fact that I, a white woman, am attempting to discern whiteness from the perspective of American Indians, complicates the project. In her insightful exploration of her own whiteness, Peggy McIntosh states that white privilege takes "both active forms which we can see and embedded forms which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. . . invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth" (127). Similarly, my own whiteness, inculcated and embedded, hinders my ability to be objective. Like Momaday's Father Olguin, I might assert, "*I understand!*" (House 190), yet I will remain partially blind.

Nevertheless, I am compelled to seek true sight, to look carefully into Apess's "Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man," and to acknowledge my own reflection, but not to stop there. Change will not occur, and whiteness will not be displaced if we merely rest in the fact that we know of our wrongs and feel remorse, yet do nothing. Therefore, I have structured this study as a sequence of steps to advocate not only changes in attitudes but also in actions. The first step is to look, to bid whites to gaze into the "Indian's looking-glass" to discern faults so often hidden by hypocrisy. Next, the need to listen, just as important, is called for and exemplified through "listening" to stories reinscribed into writing. Kenneth Roemer notes, "In the post-genocide, still partially colonial worlds imagined by Erdrich and other Native authors, sovereignty, endurance, and basic survival often depend upon the development of listening and interpretive skills that must combine and even transcend previous models from Euro-American and tribal cultures" (2). These skills, intrinsic to the performative aspects of American Indians' oral tradition, must be cultivated in white readers before true communication and transcendence from the position of privilege can occur.

Finally, acknowledgement of wrongs through an attitude of humility needs to be followed through with action. Tim Wise, in “Membership Has Its Privileges: Thoughts on Acknowledging and Challenging Whiteness,” asserts that “it isn’t enough to see these things, or think about them, or come to appreciate what whiteness means: though important, this enlightenment is no end in itself. Rather, it is what we do with the knowledge and understanding that matters” (134). Wise states that to combat this, we need to be creative in devising ways in which whites can actively work to combat racism. His own suggestions reveal a common thread: “[T]hey require whites to leave the comfort zone to which we have grown accustomed. They require time, perhaps money, and above all else, courage. . . to pay attention to the need to challenge and change the perpetrators of and collaborators with the system of racial privilege” (136). The comfort zone of white privilege, or the “unearned race advantage and conferred dominance” (McIntosh 126), must be repudiated by whites. Then, in this act of displacement, whites and American Indians, as well as others, may meet in new “sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha 2).

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