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Dustin Gray Date

“Novel Silence: The Limits of Articulation in Native American Fiction”

By

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"Novel Silence: The Limits of Articulation in Native American Fiction"

By

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M.A., University of Oklahoma, 2009
B.A., University of Oklahoma, 2006

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

"Novel Silence: The Limits of Articulation in Native American Fiction"
By Dustin Gray

The dissertation proposes that approaches to the relationship between silence and articulation in Native American literary studies can be enhanced by closer readings of the multiple registers of silence in novels featuring "alienated" protagonists. Critics of Native literature have long recognized silence as an integral feature of storytelling, even a feature consistent with an indigenous worldview. The problem addressed in the dissertation, however, has to do with the ways critics advocating for the "power of the word" in approaches to Native-authored novels have been inconsistent in their treatments of silence and articulation. Though there has been an espoused commitment to the interdependency between silence and language, critics tend to set limits on how much of it and what kinds of silence they will accept. For these critics, silence is especially problematic when attached to the experiences of protagonists who have been described as estranged from their respective cultures and who seem to be out of sync with traditional values, beliefs, and ways of being in the world. In this sense, silence is pathological when it distances protagonists from what is imagined as authentic Indian identity and culture. One of the goals of "Novel Silence" is to interrogate why silence tends to be valued only when it is imagined to cohere with authentic culture. It attempts to demonstrate how certain norms assigned to articulation end up reinforcing affirmative approaches to Native literature that fail to value presumably negative features of silence. The imperative to advocate for the saliency of silence in Native novels has been weakened by the tendency to delineate its powers and effects into negative and positive, the former to be denigrated, and the latter to be praised, often along the lines of perceived congruence with "tradition." The dissertation problematizes these distinctions in readings of silence and related forms of inarticulate expression in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Frances Washburn's *Elsie's Business*, John Joseph Mathews' *Sundown*, and Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*.

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Introduction: Whither Silence?

"Novel Silence" is a study of how certain forms of articulation come to serve as indices of cultural authenticity in Native American-authored novels. While emphasis on the power of "the Word" and storytelling serves as an underlying premise of much of Native literary studies, surveying the critical landscape creates the impression that silence can be valued too insofar as its representation in the fictive realm demonstrates a commitment to and alignment with what are perceived to be "traditional" values. These values, cohering to norms of community, speaking, and well-being, inform critics' approaches to the vitality of the protagonists in the novels under consideration. In one set of approaches to the problems of articulation, the study of Native American novels often amounts to an evaluation of the central character's ability to participate in tribally authentic speech. Such an authenticity entails characters' appropriate relationship with and attitude toward forms of silence, often related to the kind of reverence afforded to the power of language. The saliency of silence, according to some critics, falters when protagonists' inability, or even refusal, to speak places them in opposition to "tradition" or appears to prohibit their participation in authentic forms of culture, willingly or not. "Novel Silence" proposes that these deviations from cultural norms could instead be considered as acts of obstructed or diminished agency that fail to resolve a supposed tension between speech and silence, and that the failure itself is meaningful in its resistance to conformity to tradition.

Resisting the tendency to bifurcate silence into "good" and "bad" or "authentic" and "inauthentic" emboldens a methodology that does not concern itself with affirmative approaches to Native fiction. Seeming to impose a teleology of identification in

accordance with communal protocols, many critics uphold normalizing rules that would find all that is possibly weird, shameful, and uncomfortable about these stories of inarticulate protagonists intolerable. Strangeness is made to be purged in this account of novels, but Native literary studies can become flexible enough to accommodate such deviancies by challenging the impulse to find authenticity in affiliation and belonging. A key point is not affirmation of Native culture, identity, and philosophy, but an understanding of their dynamism and inability to be reined into any strict category that would seek to homogenize difference. While critics might prioritize the capability of characters and novels to "speak," I want to muddle the clarity of their position and promote the elasticity of "tradition." Differentiated within a splatter of possibilities, "speaking" is scrutinized for the radical directions it takes in terms of agency, whether in the realm of silence, solitary speech, or any configuration of language not legitimized as clearly "articulate."

Given all the routes to agency and affirmation the atlas of Native criticism encourages us to take, the attention to silence and diminished articulation, especially in its perceived "negative" forms, is a hard road to follow. Critics often want their protagonists, and their authors and novels, to speak partly because of the influence of previous decades of multicultural criticism that has labored to question the legitimacy of the so-called “canon,” particularly by gathering together voices that speak outside and against the hegemony of white patriarchy, the supposedly hidden agenda behind the promotion of “great books.” Foregoing the impulse to "give voice to the voiceless," a mantra among advocates of multicultural approaches to literature, presents a challenge to the student of so-called minority or ethnic literatures given that silence has been

constructed as a burden, perhaps even a sin, that must be cast off, lest the voice of those supposedly holding power continue to oppress, repress, and destroy. "Giving voice" then becomes a monumental task requiring its proponent to question a mainstream history or mythos that has eradicated certain perspectives, to demonstrate how those perspectives have not been absent, just placed under erasure, and to restore those voices, thus making the critical pursuit one in which every literary text from the hitherto "voiceless" represents a rather strong, active "voice," often performing the work of protest.

The "minority discourse" pursued often depends on affirmation, celebration, and hyperbolic "activity." In this respect, not only do we want our subaltern protagonists to be representative of their cultures and to talk, we want them to scream and shout. Acts of voice, in this view, are politically legitimate when they are indicative of bold, robust agency. We abhor passivity, so we cannot accept a brief whisper as a viable act of "giving voice." The vocabulary at the disposal of the literary critic centers on this heightened activity, thus the commonplace descriptors of rhetorical agency: "This novel challenges" or "the story deconstructs" and so on. In tandem with the characters, then, criticism tends to personify literary texts themselves as if they function as active, speaking subjects. The somewhat anthropomorphic approach depends not only on the assumption of a body, but a body defined by its seeming able-bodiedness, competently participating in normative fashion.

It would seem that much is at stake, politically and otherwise, in studies advocating voice. To attend to the facets of silence and inactivity might risk betrayal of what is presumed to be one of the tasks of studies of non-canonical literatures because to do so would risk reinforcing stereotypes and gross generalizations centered on passivity

that have worked historically to generate oppression and injustice. Yet, given the social and activist component advocated for by many in multicultural literary circles, I find it suspicious that the imperative to speak holds so much power in attempts to demonstrate the humanity of literary texts while the real, lived experience of folks who choose not to speak, to speak seldom, to only speak when spoken to, who, all in all, have many reasons for speaking or not to varying degrees, get left out of the equation. Critical methodologies attempting to outline and describe a process of "coming to voice" tend to inscribe a linearity usually denigrated in literary studies; even more, proponents impose a developmental, narrative template on social realities, assuming that fictional representations of voice serve as a model, even an ethical imperative, for how people should act in the "real world." It would seem, then, that a rhetoric of exceptionalism determines value in multicultural literature: those who speak loudest and brightest best promote understanding and it would be in marginalized folks' best interest to follow their lead.

This is not to say that these methods have proved invaluable or that the sense of idealism abstracted from fictional representations can have no real-world effects. The idea of "giving voice" has been incredibly productive in terms of thinking about the value of literature as an institution, as entertainment, as intellectual exercise, as expression, and also as a way of building up wide-ranging, diverse, and inclusive literary curricula and programs. The problems entertained here have more to do with smaller-scale issues attending to the specific worlds literary texts allow us to inhabit and less to do with large-scale issues of canon formation and political and cultural activism. In this way, degrees of correspondence between fiction and reality, with respect to what they reveal to us

about the value of speaking and articulation, might best be questioned rather than presumed. In enhancing these approaches, I advocate for skepticism regarding the value assigned to speaking which weighs so heavily on literary studies that we miss out on all the potential of voicelessness, speechlessness, inactivity, passivity, weakness, failure, and other often negatively marked traits that make literary worlds dynamic and interesting.

To attend to silence involves considering the possible limitations of the valorisation of speaking. The persistent affirmative approach may not address the dangers of voice, especially because it assumes that the powers bestowed by speaking lead to benevolence and integrity. Audre Lorde recognizes this precariousness of silence and speaking in her essay "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" in which she observes that "your silence will not protect you" while at the same time acknowledging all the ways that failure to maintain silence create opportunities for vulnerability (41). For Lorde, to speak is an act fraught with ambivalence, fear, and risk, thus the masterful way in which, in just a few short pages, she manages to meditate on the power and powerlessness created by “voice.” Since speaking does not guarantee much, she calls for careful examination of words. Following from her thinking, it might be worthwhile to consider speaking as a particular risk, and to acknowledge that the power that comes from voice can be unwieldy.

Lorde's interest in the “transformation of silence” has to do with self-identification, questioning, and intersubjective experience. What Lorde does not touch on (given the length and purposes dictated by the genre of the essay - an MLA address), and what may be significant when considering the value of voice, involves making some distinction between speaking and articulation. To simplify, for my purposes: speaking

encompasses any verbal act of language (a prayer, a greeting, a question, and so on) that may or may not have an intended or actual effect, may or may not have an intended or actual listener, and may or may not have any meaning for the speaker. Articulation, as a particular mode of speaking, involves explication of a person, feeling, object, including the self or other non-human object, with the intent and strategy of communicating to the self or others a sense of complete understanding – a lecture on genre, a diagnosis of cancer, a sermon on sin, and so on. Distinguishing between the two softens an opposition between speech and silence that may seem to undermine the approach taken to the novels with respect to the dynamism of language. Contrary to many critics' perspectives, the category of speech need not be reduced to an evaluative frame dependent solely on "articulation" since there exist many other possibilities.

What is important is the presumption that authentic language within a novel serves as a potential resource for a "subaltern" protagonist to speak, to achieve a state of articulation, as if in simply saying something about some other thing or some other person or about the self leads to some ideal truth between the speaking subject and the spoken-to object, including the reader. This, in some sense, is the compulsion to mastery: to have dominion over some object by saying what it is, a concept useful for self-determination, but also troubling in exerting control, giving shape to something else beyond its power to accept said proclamation, or to challenge and change it. An examination of the value of articulation might be addressed by evaluating the ways in which it not only marks visibility and legitimacy but also by the degree to which it conveys some sense of responsibility to its own powers, may they be inaugural, performative, transformative, and descriptive. On the underside of this, we might also

consider what responsibilities acts of silence and passivity prompt when understanding the value of speaking, particularly when language antagonizes or fails.

The authors under consideration (N. Scott Momaday, Frances Washburn, John Joseph Mathews, and Mourning Dove) employ a variety of narrative techniques to create a relationship between reader and character that encourages identification *and* distance through representations and the performance of silence. The characteristic of distance – that novels alienate readers from character - presents a challenge to the literary critic who upholds empathy and accessibility as key features of novels that point to their value as cultural artifacts that promote understanding. In my approach to the multiple forms of silence, I suggest that novelists have been adept at communicating negative feelings of shame, alienation, and discomfort that must be diligently thought through in order to instigate understanding. In much of the criticism, and in Native literature more generally, however, these affective registers are often meant to be purged or eradicated as the protagonist and reader find their way to an authentic place within their Native community. I argue that holding on to silence, as it were, and refusing to delineate its features into authentic and inauthentic categories, offers a perspective on reading experiences with a wide range of emotive and intellectual responses that do not necessarily cohere to formulations critics have readily applied to Native literature. This leaves open the possibility that silence and the inability to articulate make novels a vehicle for understanding how language can fail, how triumph is not a necessary endpoint for "authentic" language or "Indian" discourse.

In attempting to understand how novels produce silence and diminished forms of articulation, the chapters attend to both a protagonist's distinctive speaking and

communicative habits and also to the gaps and ambiguities of the texts as an effect of novelistic discourse. A well-worn notion, perhaps even a sophomoric or romanticized one, that the "unspoken" elements of a narrative are just as important as "spoken" ones enables a reading practice that imagines protagonists' responses to other characters' acts of language. The reader, in this scenario, hears the silence and attempts to fill in the gap, particularly in response to many critics' insistence on "giving voice." The assumptions allowing the reader to do this kind of work I have partly outlined above and attempt to explain more thoroughly in the main chapters.

On the level of character, moreover, novels produce silence simply by not allowing characters to speak in scenarios that would either demand it or outright encourage it. All novels under consideration here seem to work primarily in third-person, limited-omniscient narrative modes. As a result, readers witness a character's silence because the narrator has chosen not to represent their speech or has told us that the character does not speak at all, the latter to be deciphered by the reader as inability or refusal. We will see that critics often tend toward a character's inability to speak as a way of explaining the novel's production of silence, particularly in their diagnostic approaches that seek out narrative forms inflected by pathology, trauma, and redemption. While novelists take detours in other narrative modes (first and second-person), the story still works at a distance, never clearly articulating a character's point-of-view. This results in another kind of character's silence because their thoughts are simply not made accessible in clear fashion to readers. A character's agency in terms of articulation may also be interpreted along the lines of their incorrect or inappropriate responses to others. They produce a kind of silence in that they do not appear to demonstrate competence in certain

social discourses, but seem to be conveying something of their own agency within these contexts, even if it is limited or obstructed. In this way, as I will argue, we often find silence in tandem with weird, unusual, and inappropriate acts of language. These will include whispers, child-like speech, grunts and noises, talking to one's self, talking to non-human objects and animals, and other types of speech that do not resonate with the communicative tableaux of person to person on an equal footing.

Novels also produce silence and muted forms of articulation through their failure to achieve generic and critical expectations. I will insist throughout that novels always present something about themselves that will remain silent. This partly has to do with their ability to subvert conventions of "The Native American Novel" readers and critics impose on the texts. While novelists do quite a bit of work in inhabiting familiar genres (mystery, for example) or making vibrantly present certain motifs (the search for identity, the search for language), they, at many points, fail to follow through with outright fulfillment of expectations these elements seem to demand. While this may be a universal feature of literature (that it resists any attempts to categorize it), critics often treat texts as if these ambiguities are meant to be resolved. In my approach to the novels, the question of why these texts fail to achieve certain expectations remains unanswered, but insist that the search for some kind of answer makes the reading experience dynamic and interesting. I gravitate toward answers that seem to have to do with "negative" results in order to see how silence has the possibility challenging norms we have upheld as necessary for the value of Native literature. Where we have attempted to give voice to novels, novelists, and characters, we can, as an alternative, "listen" to the silence and make vulnerable our own positions in relation to the field and to reading itself.

In the first chapter, "Stop Trying to Make Abel Talk," I tackle the issue of silence and articulation in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* with respect to the ways critics have treated Abel as an alienated protagonist. Momaday, revered as a philosopher of language in Native studies, is a great admirer of the powers of silence. In an interview with Charles Woodard, after recounting a time he stood silent before a large class on the oral tradition, making the students incredibly uncomfortable, Momaday remarks that silence is "a great restorative, and a very good creative condition" (109). The "great poets," he explains, write out of a "context of silence" and the "relationship between sound and silence is always very much in their minds, and that's good" (109). The critics of the novel agree with Momaday's assessment here and value Abel's silence for its restorative qualities: for example, his moment of introspection and self-awareness after having been brutally beaten by the cop Martinez that sets into motion what critics have constructed as his journey toward healing. There are numerous examples wherein silence indicates these modes of restoration, including the much discussed scene of Abel's silently listening to Ben Benally's "blessingway" prayer, which Abel repeats quietly to himself at the very end of the novel.

While these aspects are necessary to address, and certainly ones I consider important for the novel, I insist on analysing silence for the way it generates presumably negative effects. In Momaday's assessment of the example mentioned above, he laments that silence creates agony, discomfort, and embarrassment on his students' behalf, suggesting that if they appreciated "silence for what it is," they would not have reacted this way. Momaday seems to miss the mark in appreciating silence for everything it is – because he does not want it to be embarrassing – and this seems to be the case for critics

of the novel as well. Despite the limited reading of silence in the criticism, I argue that the novel values the discomforting effects of silence.

While it may already be acknowledged that a relationship between silences and languages plays a powerful role in shaping the protagonist's worldliness and experiences with those around him who, at times, have certain expectations about how and to what degree he should speak, many critics in the past three decades have decided that the novel is a story of an alienated veteran who struggles to achieve a sense of belonging and, more importantly, a stable identity. The novel then is interpreted along the lines of development, Abel having to achieve a sense of self compliant with communal standards of identity among the Jemez Pueblo, the pan-Indian world of Los Angeles, and other criteria for authentic Indian identity critics impose on Abel. Abel's being an outsider to "his own people" is taken to be pathological – his alienation being the result, as it's usually suggested, by postwar trauma. The imperative to diagnose Abel in this way is a strong one, especially considering the intervention of Momaday's narrator early on in the novel: Abel was "dumb … not dumb – silence was the older and better part of custom still – but *inarticulate*" (53, emphasis original). This third-person, impersonal, narrator also tells us that if Abel had been able to say "anything of his own language … [he] would once again have shown him whole to himself" (53). A few critics, most especially Charles Schubnell and Sean Teuton, whose works I review alongside other landmark criticisms in the first half of the chapter, have taken from this "diagnosis" that Abel's psychological impairment somehow equates to a lack of, or an impaired, Indian identity. In this sense, critics prescribe for Abel a routine of authentically Indian modes of speaking, singing, dancing, and other forms of activity, thus suggesting that Abel's

inarticulateness, loneliness, alienation, solitude, and other modes of seeming inactivity or passivity are somehow *not* authentically Indian characteristics.

In order to problematize the tendency to pathologize Abel's silence and inarticulateness, seeing these traits as inimical to Indian identity and integrity, I offer close readings from the novel, analyzing passages for the way they point to the irreducibility of silence into authentic and inauthentic characteristics. I isolate a few scenes in the novel wherein silence creates agony, discomfort, and embarrassment, but do not give a clear indication concerning how Abel feels about his own estrangement and relationship to tradition and community. The motivation here is to attempt to uncover some sense of Abel's agency without necessarily relegating his experiences to "development." Significant, in this regard, are the ways silence shapes Abel's interactions with characters who have been treated in the criticism as antagonists, or, at the very least, people who inhibit Abel's "development" into a "whole" Indian person. Denigrated to some degree by Momaday and critics, the women characters, Angela and Milly, interact with the protagonist in ways that explore the strange powers of silence the novel seems to generate. I attend to these and, in addition, explore the "diagnostic" competence of a significant male figure, Ben Benally, whose perspective on Abel deviates from many critics' take on his "impairment."

In the second chapter, "Tolerating Elsie's Silence," I argue that Frances Washburn's *Elsie's Business* utilizes silence to problematize readers' expectations concerning representations of sexual and gendered violence in Native fiction. The novel tells the story of a young woman, Elsie Roberts, who is beaten, raped, and murdered in late 1960s South Dakota. I argue that Elsie's silence regarding her experiences, her

refusing to speak about the "truth" of her victimization, creates feelings of agony and discomfort on behalf of both characters and readers. In order to make sense of this silence, I situate it within the context of literary criticism that has named testimonial discourse as a central feature of Native literature. The goal of testimony, I suggest, is to promote empathy, identify injustice, and underscore the importance of a communal response to violence. I survey feminist approaches to Native literature to demonstrate the significance of these arguments, offer a few ways to think about the limitations of both empathy (as a goal and strategy of literature) and communal benevolence. Following from this, I argue that Washburn's use of silence is unique because it resists empathetic identification, creates a portrait of a less than compassionate community, and offers no sense of closure. The value of the novel is the way it refuses the transformation of silence into action and leaves readers alienated, offering no relief from discomfort, agony, and terror.

What is unique about the novel in terms of its relationship to *House Made of Dawn* is that it features a protagonist who, unlike Abel, is estranged from both white and Indian communities precisely because she is traditional. (Her distance from the communities also seems to stem from her blackness, being the daughter of an Indian woman and a black man.) We discover, for example, that Elsie learns from her mother traditional practices of tanning hides and beading moccasins. She engages in these traditional acts fervently and consistently during her time in Jackson, South Dakota. More significantly in the discourse of Native literary interpretation, Elsie stands in as the embodiment of oral tradition, in this case signifying the Deer Woman stories recited early on in the novel. The response to Elsie is both an affirmation and a fear of her traditional

role. A tension develops wherein the community has to make a choice about how to reinterpret the stories. They dare not do so because it would prompt a transformation of what is perceived to be traditional. In this sense, Abel and Elsie share something in common in that their silence might be intolerable for the way it challenges tradition, even though they come from different sides of it.

In the third chapter, "Chal Chokes the Prairie Chicken," I extend the discussion of sexual politics begun in the previous chapter to a reading of silence and queerness in John Joseph Mathews' *Sundown*. In the criticism on the novel in the past few years, two critics, Robert Dale Parker and Michael Snyder, stand out for the ways they connect the protagonist's troubles with articulation, particularly with respect to the ability to name his own desires, to issues of sexual and gender normativity. Parker, for example, argues that Chal's failure to fit into a comfortable pattern of living is the result of the internalization of an impaired sense of masculinity, one brought about, in part, by the supposedly infantilizing gestures of colonialism, addressed in the novel by way of references to federal Indian policy in the early twentieth century. Snyder addresses more forcefully than Parker the issue of Chal's possible same-sex attraction, contextualizing Chal's social and existential inadequacies within homophobic culture. Snyder makes the case for the novel's homoeroticism by examining Mathews' lexicon, his consistent use of the term "queer," for example, and Mathews' use of narrative gaps, a kind of silence, if you will, that suggest, but do not outright describe, same-sex eroticism. I argue that though these arguments are compelling they seem to depend on an ideal sense of articulation, assuming, perhaps, that Chal would be better off if he were competent in naming his desires. As with the first chapter on *House Made of Dawn*, I attempt to offer a reading

that lets the silence stand, that considers what may be significant about Chal's experiences if we stop trying to make him talk. I argue that Chal's silence generates a form of sexual identification that transcends the homo/hetero binary. The protagonist's relationship to language, particularly in the way it arouses him, suggests to me masturbatory desires at the edge of fulfillment. I conclude that the novel offers queer perspectives on silence and articulation that may be helpful in bolstering a criticism that values dignity precisely by acknowledging it has been stripped away rather than restored.

The eroticism I make the case for in *Sundown* stands as peculiar in queer and Native studies contexts because it is difficult to parse it in terms of the way it generates communal identification. This would seem to be a requisite for identifying eroticism's transformative potential in bestowing dignity upon queer subjects. Indeed, Chal engages quite frequently in heterosexual acts: dating a sorority girl during his time as an undergraduate at the University of Oklahoma; going on numerous dates and having sexual liaisons with women during his time as a pilot. And Michael Snyder demonstrates that some of Mathews' narrative gaps indicate the possibilities of homoerotic liaisons, particularly with Professor Granville, who Snyder associates with queer possibilities. To the latter point, I also argue that Chal's fascination with language (an aspect of Chal's character that I see resonating with masturbatory desires) prompts a moment of relationality with Granville, suggesting that their mutual identification depends on a shared interest in solitary desires. Chal's disposition shows potential: an interest in language that does not need to be spoken or exercised through more familiar forms of articulation, yet is still intense in expression.

For the most part, it would seem that Chal's desires are at their most intense when in a state of solitude and silence. Mathews spends quite a bit of time in the novel describing Chal's "alone time," moments when silence offers him levels of experiential reality unavailable in his community: his river retreats, his flights of fancy – both figurative and literal, and his dancing alone. The scenes of Chal's dancing are especially instructive in that he expresses disdain for communal dances and attempts to find pleasure in performing what is initially a social activity on his own, but often fails to find relief from his frustration in these moments of solitude. In fact, in Chal's final act of establishing solitary integrity, he dances alone, drunk, and Mathews employs a language of sex, climax and orgasm, to describe Chal's ultimate failure in finding relief. I argue that in many of these scenes, Mathews employs a language and imagery of masturbation, but what is important about the potential autoeroticism of the novel is that it always ends up in failure, and it is in these cases that we might attempt to locate the reality of shame and the precarious place of dignity. Chal's erotics of solitude and silence may be innovative, in some sense, but they do not clearly offer the kinds of liberatory and transformative possibilities that seem to be the expected outcome of queer-inflected Native studies approaches to Native literature. Where we want to find pride, we find shame. In this way, Chal's queerness and uses of silence do not offer a clear connection to tradition.

Issues related to pride, shame, silence, and articulation come up in the fourth chapter, "Why We Can't Listen to Cogewea's Grandmother," in which I argue that Mourning Dove's novel, in ways similar to Washburn's, problematizes readers' expectations through ironic uses of silence. I first address one of the central points of

criticism on the novel that has to do with issues of authorship. Many of the critics have focused on the supposed dual voicing of the novel attributed to the fact that Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, a non-Indian male, supposedly heavily edited Mourning Dove's manuscript. I parse out the fallacious assumptions of approaches that attempt to delineate the voice of Mourning Dove and the voice of McWhorter along the lines of what could possibly be Indian and non-Indian about the language and content of the story. It has been proposed, for example, that the grandiose, articulate, and Latinate vocabulary-laden language of the novel must be attributed to McWhorter because an Indian probably would not write that way. On the other hand, the oral traditional and geographically specific descriptions and content must be attributed to Mourning Dove because a white man would not have knowledge of such things. I suggest that these attempts to explain these modes of authentic speech are ultimately fruitless, they do not really tell us much about the novel.

In moving beyond questions of authorship, I question the way the novel has been read as the story of a young woman who comes to appreciate maternal, Indian wisdom and finds a suitable place in her own community by way of marriage to an appropriate suitor. What is unique about the novel, and what is not addressed in the criticism, is that Cogewea's trajectory does not depend on her "coming to voice." This, I believe, makes it a suitable topic for the final chapter of the dissertation. In *House Made of Dawn, Elsie's Business,* and *Sundown*, silence and a lack of articulateness tend to mark their respective protagonists as abnormal, at least according to some critics. In the case of *Cogewea,* we have an example of a novel that features a protagonist whose estrangement and alienation is the result of her sense of voice and strong-willed articulation. What it shares in

common with the other novels, most especially Momaday's, is that the critics usually construct the protagonist's development along the lines of affirmation of what are perceived to be traditional values regarding communal affiliation. In the end, it is presumed, Cogewea finds her appropriate place in the Indian community. The irony is that Cogewea must end up giving up her voice, her intellectual autonomy, and maintain a kind of silence and acceptance of some other viewpoint understood as authentic: her grandmother's and Jim's perspectives on appropriate marriages and relationships, and the buffalo spirit whose voice instructs on the error of her ways. Critics insist that she must acquiesce to these voices of tradition in order to be accepted as a productive citizen of the Flathead reservation.

In reading the novel for the way voices of tradition set limits on Cogewea's intellectual integrity, I argue that Mourning Dove subtly prods readers to lament her protagonist's transformation from a speaking, active subject into a silent, passive one. I argue that this use of silence enhances feminist approaches to the novel, instead of detracting from them, and conclude that the novel is significant for the way it values dissent. What is left out of the criticism is attention to the irony of the marriage plot. On the last page of the novel, Mourning Dove writes that the moon "appeared to smile down on the dusky lovers [Cogewea and Jim], despite the ugly Swah-lah-kin clinging to its face" (284). Earlier in the novel, the Swah-lah-kin, a frog, had served as a symbol of disaster, portending Densmore's betrayal of Cogewea. This element of oral tradition that appears at the end of the novel is never articulated by any Indian character as a sign of coming disaster for Cogewea and Jim. I suggest that this is one instance of Mourning Dove's "silent dissent," her offering a way for readers to disapprove of the final marriage,

despite the "truth" of the grandmother's warning concerning Densmore. In addition to this, I bolster an argument concerning the ironies of the ending by scrutinizing the criticism that has failed to remark on the heteronormative assumptions undergirding readings that identify marriage as a secure route to solidifying Indian identity and communal integrity. Joining together a queer-inflected critique and Mourning Dove's use of symbol, I argue that the novel utilizes silence as a route to dissent.

Stop Trying to Make Abel Talk

I am not demanding a prohibition on ways to approach N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, neither am I insisting that its protagonist, Abel, should not speak. I offer a reading that demonstrates how the value assigned to the norms of speaking and articulation, particularly within the tribal contexts imagined in the novel, limits the ways we might understand how Abel's silence offers the ordering and world-making possibilities often attributed solely to the power, even primacy, of "the word." Uncovering incompatibility among Momaday's philosophy of language, his novel, and critical approaches to it, suggests that we might take a step back and ponder how and why we have so valorized voice, articulation, and speaking to the detriment of silence and other forms of seeming passivity. In order to explore the resistance to silence, and open it up to its dynamism, I schematize critics' allegiances to "the word" and delineate the unexpected ways silence plays a crucial role in their theses, even when they seemingly disavow it. Following from this, I examine the complexity of "The Arrowmaker" story, much revered by Momaday and upheld as a central statement of his philosophy of language and storytelling, to show how silence politicizes Momaday's viewpoint. Finally, I look closely at passages from the novel, reading them for the subtle ways they offer silence and the inability to articulate as crucial elements of Abel's experiences and the world he inhabits. What drives the reading involves questions that presumably have not been posited as premises for the criticism: What happens when Abel does not talk? What happens when he does not articulate? Why is voicelessness a matter of illness and health? Why do we want Abel to talk?

House Made of Dawn serves as a useful case study for considering issues of voice in Native literary studies because articulation and the seeming pathologies of anything otherwise remain persistent features of many critical approaches to the novel, though to varying degrees. Consistent throughout much of the criticism, the attention to the "problem" of Abel's inability to articulate reveals a kind of logocentric bias that can only imagine it as a conflict to be overcome. Many critics assume that silence is a problem and that it serves as a cause or effect of all of Abel's troubles. Momaday himself prejudices readers toward such a disposition in a presumably omniscient observation (a quotation referenced in nearly every single piece of criticism) that if Abel were to say anything in his "own" language (Tanoan) – even a commonplace greeting – he "would once again have shown him whole to himself" (53). The problem, or as it is referred in the beginning of the paragraph from which this observation is made, "a failure," presented here by the narrator suggests a particular reading strategy in which the trajectory of the protagonist will depend on how well, if at all, he addresses, acknowledges, and works to ameliorate this impairment. As a result, the novel is seen as describing, or at the very least, strongly suggesting, its protagonist's journey to restoration of speech. This formulation of the novel does not present a problem in itself. However, the ways in which critics place importance on the end-point of the journey assumes that silence, and whatever else Abel experiences, only serve to undermine his integrity.

Though critics attend to the ambiguities of the "success" at the end of the novel, they tend to not address the complexities related to the imperative to "diagnose" Abel as an impaired, damaged subject, or what such a diagnosis might reveal about our biases

when it comes to how much we revere Momaday's philosophy of language. Critics take many liberties with Momaday's somewhat vague description of Abel's aphasia, his inability to speak with his grandfather, or to enter into the "old rhythm of the tongue" (53), and, consequently, identify Abel's silence primarily with pathology, a deviation from the norms of speaking - presumed to be valued by the Jemez Pueblo community - that hinders his potential as an active citizen. They have decided that his silence, his being inarticulate, is purely a symptom of the malaise experienced by the alienated tribal protagonist. To be sure, Abel suffers, and it would be insincere to suggest otherwise, but the authority by which critics make diagnoses stems primarily from Momaday-as-narrator, assuming his perspective is impartial and objective. Even more, silence registers as nothing more than pathological whereas, if not for Momaday's seemingly disinterested observation, it might be seen as admirable, even indicative of an authentic Indian ethos. However, although they do not always explicitly endorse reading to the side of diagnosis, the way critics approach the novel in terms of the value of speaking points to divergences: despite their own insistence on the primacy of the word and its healing powers, they offer possibilities for the value of silence and the inability to articulate.

One set of early critics who offer substantive engagements with Momaday's work concern themselves primarily with the structural features of the novel, pointing to historical and literary precedents, ethnographic and mythological underpinnings, Momaday's philosophical leanings, and the interplay among identity, relationality, and narrative comprehension. In this case, I isolate three critics whose approaches seem to be representative of "descriptive" approaches to the mechanics of the novel: Matthias

Schubnell's *N. Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background*; Alan Velie's chapter in *Four American Indian Literary Masters*; and Susan Scarberry-Garcia's *Landmarks of Healing: A Study of House Made of Dawn*. These critics could be said to be working from the momentum gained by the inauguration of the so-called American Indian Literary Renaissance, often claimed as a movement that owes its beginnings to the prominence gained by Momaday's having won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, a fact that seems necessary to make in every piece of criticism even to this day. Given the context, the questions guiding these three critics involve issues of distinction: what makes the novel an American Indian novel? How does it relate to the tribal background of Momaday and of the fictional world Momaday imagines? Another set of critics, Sean Teuton and Robert Warrior, who in their chapters on *House Made of Dawn* in their recent books, *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* and *The People and The Word: Reading Native Non-Fiction*, respectively, tackle issues of ethics, identity, and politics as abstracted from the novel as they relate to the social and political realities of Indian country. In addition to formal elements, they consider what Momaday's work means for lived experience. With the exception of Warrior, perhaps, all of these critics attempt to explicate the novel in terms of the trajectory of its protagonist. First, I pair up Schubnell and Teuton because, although writing over twenty years apart, they share an interest in the psychological and sociological dimensions of the novel. Secondly, I briefly consider Scarberry-Garcia as a kind of outlier who eschews questions of identity and psychology but still maintains an interest in the structural features. Finally, I pair up Velie and Warrior, again writing over twenty years apart, to consider the dynamics of relationality they examine.

In "The Crisis of Identity: House Made of Dawn," Schubnell's primarily psychological approach combines a sense of universalism and at the same time a kind of local sociology in order to underscore Abel's experience – a developmental one – as an aspect of the structure of the novel. Schubnell writes: "From a developmental point of view his [Abel's] experience is universal: it is the struggle of a young man to establish a stable position in his community" (102). Schubnell enhances this "developmental" perspective by following Abel chronologically through the novel, at least to the extent that it is possible to do so, and demonstrates how Abel suffers from the lack of a stable identity, particularly by delineating the features of identity formation theorized by Erik Erikson, and showing to what extent Abel deviates from "normal" development. In emphasizing Abel's "instability," Schubnell goes so far to claim that Abel experiences, at first, a process of degeneration "as evidenced by his position as an outsider in his community, his inability to identify with tribal rituals and ceremonies, and his failure to relate on a level of intimacy to his female partners" (125). And, of course, as consistent with much of the criticism, Schubnell claims that "Abel's lack of articulation [stands] at the center of his personal and cultural isolation" (134).

In addition to the diagnostic approach, Schubnell also offers brief commentary on the sociological conditions of Abel's impairment, suggesting a cultural conflict between the elders and youth of the community: "his crisis reflects a crisis of his culture which denies its young tribal members accommodation to changing conditions" (102). Schubnell also claims, in a generic way, that "young Indians, feeling deprived of the choice between the traditional and a more individual way of life, turn their backs on the native community" (106). Whatever the roots of Abel's ills, Schubnell, as well as

Teuton, make clear that, in order to achieve "restoration," Abel must find harmony and balance with the world and his community, particularly through the achievement of articulation. Schubnell claims that "in order to achieve this harmony Abel must regain his physical and mental wholeness and his power of the word" (134). In understanding Abel's condition from this developmental perspective, we are led to read the novel in terms of the trajectory of its protagonist: someone who must find stability in his community through "ritualistic expression of human creativity through words in songs and prayers and through motion in dance and ceremonial races" which are the central instruments "by which the Indian maintains a balance between himself and the universe" (132).

Both Schubnell and Teuton attend to the journey to articulation as a matter of narrative and structural features, by way of mapping out a process of coming to voice crucial for character development and narrative closure, but they differ on how to theorize wholeness and restoration. Schubnell applies a presumably universal developmental model of "stable identity formation," required for Abel's mental well-being. "Embodying Lands: Somatic Place in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*," from Teuton's *Red Land, Red Power*, evidences adherence to Schubnell's psychological perspective, including the necessity of articulation in relation to community and self, and with a stronger emphasis on a language-mediated relationship to land. For Teuton, however, wholeness has less to do with psychological theories of well-being and more to do with what seem to be Indian-specific perspectives on morality and ethics, achieved by Abel through coordination with what Teuton identifies as "proper" speaking and motion. The imperative to speak, then, is a moral and ethical matter for

Indian identity and wellness: if Abel is not triumphant in situating himself – through articulation and motion – in "proper accordance" to land, community, and self, he cannot "grow" and will fail "to exist fully as an Indian" (54). Given Teuton's consistent use of a concept he calls "tribal realism," it would seem that Abel's struggles extend beyond the world of the novel and into our own. What's at stake in fiction is also what's at stake for the integrity of Indian experience and identity in the real world. Momaday, in this sense, dramatizes the necessity of articulation in Indian country. "Coming to voice," from Teuton's perspective, is not simply a literary theme, thus he sees its liberatory and transformative potential for fiction and the real world, at least to a greater degree than Schubnell might.

Despite the differences between them, I would venture to guess that Schubnell and Teuton are representative of the types of critics most widely accepted by readers of *House Made of Dawn*, and their basic methodologies are readily accepted as minimally sufficient for most prose fiction in Native letters. Most appealing for readers is the way they establish the primacy of "the word" in their approaches by way of deferral to Momaday's philosophy of language. Schubnell offers a chapter solely dedicated to Momaday's writings on these issues and Teuton states that Momaday "clearly holds imagination and language as central tools to sustain and recover Indigenous cultures" and thus the novel "demonstrates the irreplaceable role of language in the lives of American Indians" (53). It is difficult, then, to try and parse their work for understanding what might be valuable about silence and the inability to articulate since it requires narrative closure and the achievement of voice for interpretation. This criticism would be least kind to any thesis attempting to think outside the developmental trajectory mandated by

their approaches. Their developmental models depend on a concept of "wholeness," an ambiguous keyword often found in Native literary studies, which seems to refer to a tribal protagonist's sense of a worldview that recognizes interconnectedness among all things, but most especially understanding that the qualities of authentic tribal experience and philosophy are necessary for wellness. Constructing wholeness as an end-point for Abel suggests that he "lacks" some vital elements that would contribute to his overall integrity. There is, then, little room for understanding Abel's dignity if we respect him only insofar as he accomplishes certain goals set out for him and overcomes his illness. My intervention is to suggest that thinking outside the boundaries of development may cultivate respect, even admiration, for Abel's suffering and impairment, especially in considering his silence not just as "lack" but as a valuable form of difference.

I offer here two possibilities for thinking of alternatives to development and wholeness in relation to Schubnell's and Teuton's theses. Crucial to Abel's recovery, as both critics have it, involves a moment of self-diagnosis, and both critics point to the scene of Abel laying on the beach, after having been beaten brutally by the cop Martinez. Schubnell notes that the "recognition" Abel comes to about himself during this scene "epitomizes the entire development of the novel up to this point" (133). What's interesting here is that Abel's condition prompts a moment of self-knowledge, meaning, perhaps, that his being silent or inarticulate has revelatory powers. Silence offers a way of knowing one's self in relation to the world, and it is only *after* this moment that Abel finds himself, supposedly, on the road to recovery through meaningful acts of language and motion. Without this recognition there could be no "coming to voice." Silence and

speaking might be understood as complementary forces that grant some kind of power, an idea I take up later in discussion of the Arrowmaker story.

Secondly, Schubnell and Teuton depend on what may seem an unquestionable premise: that *House Made of Dawn* is best read as a character-driven novel with Abel necessarily at its center. In this way, they need Abel to talk in order to make sense of a text that ostensibly works well as a novel with a protagonist. This might be a peculiar point, but Momaday has rarely written a straight-forward prose piece, so it might do well to consider that *House Made of Dawn* could be read as a genre twisting text, that does not require its classification as a novel centered on a main character in order to be understood for its artistry. The book does not have to be read as a vehicle for Momaday's telling of a story of a young man attempting to establish a stable position in his community. Thinking around the developmental trajectory imposed on the text in order to make sense of it might offer possibilities for imagining the text as a vehicle for Momaday's characteristically playful and genre-twisting approach to writing, in which we find, for example, a narrator who presumes the authority of articulation but often times does not know quite as much as he thinks he does, and thus readers may end up questioning what trust we can put into him in making pronouncements about Abel's condition. The values accorded to silence and speaking might be scrutinized without making Abel's triumph over illness the focus of the novel.

Following from this, it might be said that deviation from the thesis of necessary articulation would require departure from the psychological perspectives on the novel. Scarberry-Garcia, Velie, and Warrior, I believe, offer such considerations. Scarberry-Garcia's book-length study, *Landmarks of Healing*, carries forward, obviously, ideas of

healing, balance, restoration, harmony, and wholeness, found in Schubnell's work. Healing and restoration, once again, are requisites for understanding the novel itself, but she approaches this differently than her predecessors in that she offers a delicate reading of the possible correlations between the novel and mythic cycles among the Dine, Jemez Pueblo, and Kiowa peoples. This is significant because she does not posit these traditional stories as absolute structuring features of the novel, instead she strongly suggests the parallels and points to both major and minor details that open up the possibilities of intertextuality. She's also mindful to pull from resources which Momaday himself consulted in writing. I do not want to rehearse here her dense, sophisticated readings, but instead attend to the sensitivity with which she addresses one of these possible instances of interplay between the written text and "oral tradition." Especially compelling is her treatment of the Navajo story of the Stricken Twins of the Night Chant from which Momaday takes his title. "One way to look at these stories," she writes, "is to view them as fundamental tales of spiritual growth, wherein heroes are separated from their people in order to be initiated into esoteric knowledge that they eventually share when they return home. This pattern of separation-initiation-return accumulates power for the heroes, as it expresses deeply held cultural values, such as the riskiness of violating taboo or the strength and obligation of kinship" (19). *House Made of Dawn* partakes in this hero pattern, she claims, and in subsequent pages she provides convincing close readings of "twinning" in the novel that correlate to the Stricken Twins. Importantly, she notes that these twins, as with other twins' stories, are the "heroes in the origin myths of their respective chantways" (18). Throughout her analysis, she points to disjunctures that "allow Momaday the creative leeway that he needs to tell a

contemporary story that is imaginatively both within and outside of oral tradition" (20). She seems to admire Momaday for these "imaginative adaptations" precisely because they do not neatly cohere with their sources.

These departures are significant not only in terms of form, but also for the way that they take away from the healing and wholeness motifs that critics like Schubnell and Teuton hold so dear. If the novel primarily concerns itself with healing and articulation, and if Momaday purposefully drew from these twin stories, then it would seem peculiar that he chose to depart from elements of the traditional stories having to do with articulation and healing. For example, Scarberry-Garcia notes that, unlike the twins of the Night Chant stories, Abel: "has no extensive cure performed for him" (19); "Abel meets no spirit helpers or Holy People who reveal to him the intricacies of the universe or the means of overcoming his dilemmas" (20); and "Abel does not repeatedly tell his story, as the Stricken Twins do, nor does he become a teacher in his home community" (20). She concludes that because of these disjunctures the novel "indicates the extent to which Abel is prevented from following the course of cultural healing patterns" (20).

For my purposes, her method is compelling in that it suggests there's something not quite right in reading into the novel the developmental point of view in which all energies are invested in Abel's healing – the discord with his possible mythological counterparts, significant because of their relation to the Night Way chant, suggests a bias more toward failure than completion. Additionally, again, if these counterparts have relevance, Abel does not achieve the same level of articulation as the twin heroes since he is not invested with the ability to give the "oral tradition" back to anyone else, an aspect that seems to be important for function of the stories themselves. Further, Scarberry-

Garcia suggests a kind of intertextual play always waiting to be uncovered, but that can never be fully explicated. The novel always presents something about itself that will be silent. In this way, Schubnell and Teuton commit some blasphemy, it might be said, in purporting to understand the function of "oral tradition," particularly as it relate to Abel's healing, because they do not attend to the polyvalences of traditional acts of language which supposedly do the work of integrating Abel into the world. This, as I suggested earlier, has to do with the compulsion to mastery over an object that often attends to the value placed on articulation.

Scarberry-Garcia's study points to the difficulty of reading *House Made of Dawn* in a straight-forward fashion partly because she departs from the psychological imperative characteristic of much of the criticism on the novel and shows how culture cannot be some discrete object readily talked about. In different ways, Alan Velie and Robert Warrior step to the side of the questions of psychology by attending to difficulties of reading the novel in terms of reader reception, particularly in attempting to sketch out what conflicts Abel faces, that is, in understanding how antagonism is to be understood in the story. In "*House Made of Dawn*: Nobody's Protest Novel," a chapter-length version of one of the earliest essays on the novel, Velie, at times, sounds like many of the numerous critics subsequent to his own work by, for example, offering excessive praise to the novel and Momaday; claiming that "obviously [Abel's] problem is largely that he has lost his cultural identity" (52); and noting that "language, the power of the word, is extremely important to Momaday, and he makes it clear that, because he cannot express himself, Abel is emotionally stifled and repressed, and so potentially violent" (60). Given the proximity of his chapter to the publication of Schubnell's it might seem that

they share much in common. They do, except that Velie focuses primarily on the questions having to do with the degree that Abel can be considered a victim, and, if he is a victim, who serves as his antagonist. His answers differ from Schubnell's and later critics' understanding of antagonism.

House Made of Dawn and many Native-authored novels before and after it have been subjected to the "between two worlds" thesis, imagining protagonists' struggles emanating from the difficulties involved in figuring out and understanding appropriate degrees of affiliation to a traditional Indian world and a modern non-Indian world. Schubnell claims, for example, that the novel "shows how a traditional Indian community which is threatened in its cultural survival by an encroaching alien world is struggling to defend itself against this influence" (136), and thus imagines Abel's suffering as a result of this confluence. Momaday, in this view, favors Abel and leads readers to imagine his struggles and triumphs as forms of resistance to an "encroaching alien world." Velie objects to the simplistic reading of the novel as a "protest novel," in which Abel serves as a "noble red victim of the barbaric forces of white America" (53). To subvert this simplicity, Velie suggests that "Abel's problems, in fact, seem to stem chiefly from the intolerance of other Indians" (60), and he makes this point rather strongly by offering a parallel between Abel's Biblical counterpart, the "first victim," murdered by his own brother, not some hostile outsider, and Abel's "brother Indians," Tosamah and the albino Juan Reyes Fragua, "who do the worst damage to Abel" (55). After analysing Abel's interactions with Tosamah and Fragua as instances of Indian-on-Indian antagonism, he claims even more dramatically that Abel's problems stem not just from "individuals like Tosamah and the albino, but the whole Tanoan community of Walatowa" (60), and this

has to do with the fact that he was born an outsider, not knowing who his non-Jemez father was.

Velie's take on antagonism is quite compelling, especially considering the earlier date of its publication, and, unfortunately, his perspective has not had much staying power in criticism in the decades that followed. Schubnell, Teuton, and many other critics, in forwarding their theses on healing and wholeness, too often assume benevolence on behalf of the Indian communities in which Abel finds himself attached. In the novel, this just is not the case. Additionally, what is significant about Velie's chapter is that it does not employ the rhetoric of balance and harmony, even as Velie assumes the loss of cultural identity as constitutive of Abel's experience, and, in not doing so, suggests there might be something farcical about approaches to cultural elements of the novel that impose such a rhetoric on a supposedly communal, Indian ethos. Schubnell and Teuton seem to struggle with this because at the same time that they call for a sense of wholeness maintained by speaking and other forms of ritual they also promote eradication of Abel's ills, his estrangement, voicelessness, violence, and immorality. Would not these be necessary in an ethic that considers all things to be put into balance? Velie's perspective suggests that egalitarianism is not upheld within the Indian community imagined in the novel, and instead the community will value Abel only insofar as he can exist as a speaking, articulate, active subject. From a communal standpoint then, being silent and inarticulate are understood as pathological, and this makes Abel's troubles primarily others', not necessarily his own. These inactive, passive components of Abel's experience might be understood as offering alternatives to the status quo of a community that might not, in the first place, even want him around.

Attempting to understand how the antagonisms work in the novel underscores ways in which silence may be a unique quality that perhaps should not be so readily subject to eradication, or "healing."

Over twenty years later, Robert Warrior, in his chapter "Momaday in the Movement Years: Rereading 'The Man Made of Words,'" takes up similar issues in that he tackles the difficulty of delineating Abel's antagonists in the novel, as well as how these antagonisms should be understood. Warrior sidesteps the issue of psychological development of identity and offers a fresh, rather complex approach, in that he addresses elements of the novel by situating them in relation to Momaday's non-fiction, which in turn he situates in the historical and political context in which Momaday delivers the "Man Made of Words" essay at the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars in 1970. This is unique because Warrior is one of the only critics who does not depend primarily on the novel itself for evidence of its own interpretation. Warrior has been a strong advocate for reading Native literatures contextually, particularly within an "intellectual history," and has also served as an important commentator on the directions Native literary criticism have and might take. In this chapter, his ability to look back at the past thirty years or so of criticism allows him to identify the difficulty of recognizing the politics of Native literature. He writes, "the more complex contours of politics in the 1970s Indian world are obscured by too narrow a focus on the Indian world as a place where a particular kind of radicalism defines the political parameters of the Indian world" (160), and, as a result, he later explains, "the reading of politics in the field of Native literature has been impoverished by a tendency to see activism on one side and a sort of quietest lack of engagement on the other" (173). Motivating Warrior's perspective on

Momaday involves the disservice done to his work when read as quietest. Warrior argues that "Momaday in his work seems not so much to avoid politics as to be political in a different way than what was possible at the time" (158).

Warrior's approach to this problem is twofold. First, he attends to *House Made of Dawn* and what he calls "Abel's worldliness," and, "in such a reading, war veteran Abel not only becomes alienated from his familial and tribal past, but is more accurately someone who faces a life proscribed by the faceless character of federal policy" (161). Warrior juxtaposes the bureaucratic culture of the late 60s and early 70s motivating the radical activism of the time with the bureaucratic culture minimally referenced in the novel: "an office supply company's storage facility sitting atop both the floor of the building where Tosamah … lives and the basement where he maintains the church" (169); moreover, Abel's experiences with Millie, a bureaucrat whose "questionnaires … remind Abel of similar situations while in prison" (169). While he readily admits these are only minor details, he argues that this is but one way to comprehend Momaday's ideas on words and languages "help[ing] us understand the lives of Indian people who are surrounded, even imprisoned, by politics and policy and by the words through which policy is propagated" (169), an especially powerful point when pitted against what Warrior calls the "worst sort of literacy" of the BIA in which "human experience was translated into millions of words that could conveniently and harmlessly remain locked away in the cold steel of a filing cabinet within the stone walls of a building hundreds and thousands of miles from those to whom those memos and reports mattered" (168).

Next, Warrior approaches the problem of parsing Momaday's politics by a careful consideration of the Arrowmaker story. The Kiowa story, upheld by Warrior as central to

the Momaday canon as "a necessary stopping place in situating his relationship to language, literature, and the natural world" (171), involves a man, who when struck with fear by the presence of a shadow cast on his tipi, readies his bow and asks the stranger outside that if he is Kiowa, then he will understand his words. When the stranger does not respond, the man carefully aims his arrow, lets go, and shoots straight to his enemy's heart. Abstracting from Momaday's reverence for this story, Warrior suggests that he offers a "contrast to the highly public nature of the protests of that era" and seems "to be offering a sharper weapon for overcoming that invisible enemy than what he perceived in the activism of the time" (174-5). For Momaday, then, language has the power to "overcome the faceless enemy, another unnamed character, that threatens our homes and homelands" (175).

Warrior imagines Momaday meditating on the morality and ethics of language when confronting the "shadows outside" and provides a set of questions, prompted by the story, that "one can answer only through experience and trust in oneself": "Can I remain in the ordinariness requisite to keep those shadows at bay long enough to respond to them rightly? Is my aim straight? Can I find the question that will allow me to decide fate not just for myself, but for others inside and outside my world, as well? And, finally, do I have the courage to live with my answers to these questions and act accordingly?" (177-8). Warrior, of course, has much more to say on the matter but I will not belabour the points. What's important here is that Warrior attempts to make clear what is unspoken, or briefly spoken, in Momaday's fiction and non-fiction when it comes to political perspectives, challenging the criticism that has only seen him as silent on political matters. This requires a bit of creativity on Warrior's part, and though the connections he

makes to *House Made of Dawn* are not entirely convincing, partly because he does not engage in a substantive close reading, he opens up the door for thinking about the novel in relation to the Arrowmaker story, particularly as it addresses the power of language.

To connect the Arrowmaker to the role of silence and the inability to articulate in Momaday's novel remains a challenge in the way that Warrior approaches it, so I want to put into question his account of it in order to consider the possible connections. First, I suggest that story is perhaps a bit more radical than Warrior might initially have it. The question I might pose for Warrior's analysis is this: To what degree can the Arrowmaker story offer an alternative to radical politics when it involves the revelation that 1) the Arrowmaker knows he has an enemy, 2) knows he has a crucial advantage over him, and 3) this knowledge leads to a violent act? To my way of thinking, language is radically political in this story in that it constructs with some certainty an "ominous unknown" into an outright enemy who must be oppressed and eradicated. What seems to be left out of Warrior's account is that language can be unwieldy, dangerous, and not entirely useful, when it comes to attempts to articulate the unknown. In this specific scenario, language creates power differential and asymmetries that, for all we know, might be entirely unfair. Why must the failure to respond amount to sufficient evidence for imagining antagonism? I suggest, then, that we might problematize the role of the Arrowmaker since he seems to be overly aggressive, too eager to name someone as an enemy.

Mapping out the language game played by the Arrowmaker in relation to *House Made of Dawn* might create some disturbing outcomes. If we were to imagine Abel in this scenario it is not entirely clear what role he would take up. We know that Abel is inarticulate, struggling to speak in accordance within his own cultural contexts, so his

candidacy as the Arrowmaker remains unlikely. Abel, then, might very well find himself as the outsider, a victim of the "traditionalist" whose only recourse to mediate his relationship to a stranger is to engage in quotidian acts of language, a decision that would not bode well for Abel since, as Momaday tells us, he cannot even speak a simple greeting. To reconfigure the dynamics of the tableaux in this way suggests that Abel's critics function as the Arrowmaker trying to get him to talk in order to determine how well he contributes to the integrity of what is imagined as authentic Indian identity and ways of being in the world. The problem here is that a proper understanding of language presumably serves as the sole criterion for determining insiders and outsiders, enemies and allies, thus constructing speaking as the act that shapes this relationality.

Despite whatever alternatives Warrior offers to radicalism and quietism, he seems to evidence a logocentric bias that has become characteristic of much of the criticism on Momaday, not surprising in a book called *The People and The Word*. The Arrowmaker story itself, however, might be interpreted to demonstrate how speaking alone is not sufficient for marking the power differentials in that scenario. The power granted to the Arrowmaker by speaking is nearly indistinguishable from the power granted by the stranger's silence. There seems to be some interdependency between the two that has not been explicated by Warrior or even Momaday himself. The stranger's silence, no matter what degree it can be construed as an act of agency, plays a transformative role for both. Silence shapes the world for both of them in similar ways to speaking.

Attending to the registers of speaking and silence in *House Made of Dawn* requires consideration of the interplay between them and how this dynamic structures the relationships between Abel and those who attempt to impose their idea of the power of

language upon him, in friendly, antagonistic, sympathetic, and indifferent ways. Many critics isolate Ben Benally as a significant figure in this regard, and while his role is important, the criticism also tends to configure Abel's experience with language in terms of his relationship to men. This is, perhaps, not unsurprising given the kind of universalism Momaday often conveys through his seemingly default use of male pronouns, the "man made of words," for example. With few exceptions, critics offer only minimal attention, a silence, if you will, regarding figures like Angela and Milly, whose roles it would seem matter only insofar as they contribute or detract from Abel's healing. Schubnell, along the lines of his developmental model of identity formation and stability, suggests that Abel fails to "achieve true intimacy" with Angela, and attributes this, in part, to his "lack of articulation," the "main obstacle to an intimate relationship with Angela" (118). In this way, Abel "avoids exposing himself to humiliation and chooses to remain in the shell of his own self" (117). This suggests a strategy of avoidance, of limiting his interactions with Angela, making silence something of an unhealthy defence mechanism. Kathleen Donovan, in her feminist approach to Momaday, in her book *Coming to Voice*, provides a villainous portrait of Angela, whose use of "manipulative language" and "inappropriate laughter" place her in "opposition to [Abel's] healing" (75). Depending on a healing trajectory tied to Native landscape similar to Teuton's, Donovan also wants to make Milly "as dangerous and manipulative as Angela" because she "attempts to tie him to her through language, acculturation, and sexuality" (79). Though it can be difficult to distinguish between her commentary and Momaday's perspective as developed in the novel, Donovan suggests ways that language can be dangerous, yet she still asserts the primacy of "the Word" given her interest in what should be considered

"appropriate" acts of language. For Schubnell, Donovan, and Teuton, Angela and Milly's roles in the novel help to establish the idea that Momaday subordinates silence to speaking and, even further, that the values attached to speaking and silence can be discerned by the way they are mapped onto activity and passivity, the latter of which always indicating or worsening Abel's pathology.

The Arrowmaker marks himself as an active subject able to determine the type of relationality necessary for his subsequent actions, thus making speaking a prerequisite for appropriate responses to others. What is volitional in this scenario is not entirely clear, however, because Momaday notes that the Arrowmaker speaks because he has to given the circumstances. It has become commonplace to assume that Abel must speak, yet his interactions with Angela, and to some degree Milly, demonstrate something of the dynamism at play in the Arrowmaker story in that their confrontations with Abel's silence and inability or refusal to articulate help to clarify their relationship to him. In this way, the interplay of speaking and silence break down and open up what may initially be perceived as outright antagonisms and, in addition, put pressure on the ways activity and passivity contribute or detract from agency.

Angela is especially pertinent in this regard because, upon first meeting Abel, she assumes a position of dominance: her initial expectations regarding the relationship between them depend on clichés of Indian character that, in part, would make him a passive, weaker object of her use of language. "It offend[s] her that [Abel] would not buy and sell," Momaday tells us after Abel has chopped some wood for her (30). Abel's lack of indulgence to engage in the speech-acts she wishes to coerce from him, his refusal to bargain, "to trade," sets in motion her "bring[ing] about a vengeance," a motivation

we're given in the very first paragraph of the chapter (28). She begins to ask him rather simple questions in order to garner a response that would go beyond his seeming indifference: "Shall I pay you now?"; "you will come on Friday? Or did you say Saturday?" (30). "The silence between them" makes her uncomfortable, making it difficult to "hold her ground," and so she begins to speak without intent, telling him he had "done a day's work" and "wondering why she had said it," and speaking out of frustration, "You will have to make up your mind" (30). Just before his leaving, she seems to abandon language altogether: "She would have liked to throw him off balance, to startle and appal him, to make an obscene gesture," or to ask sexually provocative questions, but she finds these of no use (31). Momaday remarks that they both remain powerless, and it would seem that whatever illusions she may have about wresting power over him through language dissipate by way of the silence making both of them uncomfortable, even ashamed.

The sense of powerlessness evoked in this section troubles the political saliency we might demand of such a scenario, particularly with respect to the relationality dealt with in the Arrowmaker tableaux. Language here offers no guarantee of power in that it does not reveal to either who holds advantage over the other. And this is precisely how we might come to understand the ordering force of silence. Silence itself cannot be controlled by either, yet it serves the purpose of establishing a dynamic between them that moves beyond the superficialities each might ascribe to the other, or even to themselves, thus Abel's shame: "his face darkened, but he hung on, dumb and immutable" (30). Herein lies the possibility that, in addition to whatever agonies we might find Abel having about his being "dumb" or "inarticulate," we might also accept

his particular silence as a basis for his relationality with others and, in addition, imagine that his ability to "hang on" depends on how appropriately others react to, or even mirror, his own disposition.

In some way, Abel's being silent and inarticulate chips away at Angela's pretensions, yet we cannot say with exact certainty how well Abel is able to control this force. It may very well be that Abel's troubles, then, stem not just from his inability to speak properly but also from a failure to recognize that silence is unique to his being. Conceptually, this offers some problems for those who subscribe to the political expediency of speaking and articulation. Ideally, it goes, we would like to see Abel as the Arrowmaker, who takes careful aim with his words and shuts down the kinds of antagonisms that would subordinate him to stereotyping, disrupting Angela's framing of him as a "wooden Indian" (32) who bargains and trades. His coming to voice would offer some model of protest. At this point in the narrative Abel has not achieved this, and Schubnell confidently states that "Abel is portrayed as the stereotype of the mute Indian" (118). Silence, in this sense, amounts to political failure. Further, it indicates pathology in need of amelioration; moreover, a passivity in need of transformation into meaningful activity. This attitude shapes a reading that depends on linearity in that it imposes the healing trajectory, insofar as "healing" involves a process of overcoming perceived impairment. Momaday, of course, prods us toward such a reading, and it is hard to avoid, but the complexity with which he treats this minor interaction with Angela should prompt a consideration of silence throughout the novel, indeed, in Momaday's philosophy of language and experience expressed in and outside the text.

The best, and perhaps only, apologist for Abel's silence is Ben Benally, and if there were any character in the novel to transform the role of the Arrowmaker in relation to the integrity of silence, it would be Ben. His sensitivity and attentiveness to the powers of language make him something of a diplomat whose ability to parse out the causes and effects of people's actions in relation to language marks him as an authority on the possibilities of the interplay between speaking and silence. Benally's insights involve his sketching out the uses of language amidst the social and political realities of the Relocation milieu of Los Angeles. One feature of his perspective involves his understanding of the problems of speaking with respect to Tosamah's verbal antagonisms. As Velie notes, Tosamah "damages" Abel more so than many of the other characters. This is significant because, as Velie suggests, "Tosomah is the character … who most closely resembles Momaday," and he is the character Momaday utilizes to "express some of [Momaday's] most deeply felt ideas about the sacred nature of the word and the power of language in the sermon Tosamah delivers to the parishioners" (58). It might seem that because of the possible correspondence, and because of the sermon he delivers on "the Word," parts of it directly coming from *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Tosamah's perspective would serve as a guidepost for evaluating Abel and the problem of articulation.

Benally, however, points to the darker, unfriendly sides of Tosamah's uses of language that do not seem to correspond well with the reverence he attributes to "the Word" in his sermon. From Benally's perspective, Tosamah "talks pretty big all the time" (131); "show[s] off and mak[es] fun of things" (131); "talk[s] crazy" (132); "likes to get under your skin … and make a fool out of you if you let him" (159); calls Abel

"too damn dumb to be civilized" and a "real primitive sonuvabitch" (131); and, one evening, starts "talking about longhairs and the reservation and all," pushing Abel to violence and drunkenness, which in turn causes him to lose his job and, as Velie suggests, his "hopes for a new life in California" (59). The portrait made here by Benally differs greatly from the Tosamah who advocates for thinking of language as an "instrument of creation" (85), instead it serves more as a destructive force, thus making him a hypocrite. In his sermon, Tosamah seems to call for a moderate, somewhat conservative approach, to the power of language, yet he is the most loquacious and obnoxious character in the novel. Benally, then, seems to be the better representative of Tosamah's sense of the "the Word."

One of the conflicts between Benally and Tosamah is their differing perspectives on Relocation, a federal program moving Indians from reservations to cities after WWII: Benally seems a bit more optimistic, and Tosamah tends to speak of Relocation in ironic and sarcastic ways. Benally's more cautious and sensitive approach to the everyday realities of Relocation life in Los Angeles grants him a perspective on Abel's predispositions unavailable elsewhere in the novel. Teuton writes that "Ben's first-person voice brings humanity and agency to a colonized world, a genuine sound to ground a novel otherwise dangerously silenced" (74). How the novel is otherwise *dangerously* silenced is unclear, and how Benally's voice is a "genuine sound," I'm not sure. What I find problematic about Teuton's valorisation of Benally has to do with Teuton's insistence on "wholeness" and "authenticity" and the self-assuredness with which he approaches the question of Abel's integrity and morality in relation to the ideals of speaking and articulation. Benally offers no such prescriptions on how Abel should

exist in the world, as far as I can tell, nor does he concern himself with fashioning Abel as an "authentic Indian." Benally volunteers himself as a guide, even a possible role model, for dealing with the intricacies of life in Los Angeles, without imposing some ideal upon him, and all the while without seeking to transform him into an active, speaking subject. Unlike Tosamah and the Relocation officers, Benally attempts to see Abel as he is and attempts to account for his disposition, thus his commentary on Abel's various uses of language. Benally notes that it "was a long time before [Abel] would talk to anyone" and a "long time before he would talk about himself – and then he never said much" (135). Because he understands the difficulties of finding one's place in a new setting, he does not want to coerce from Abel these acts of "talking about himself": "I guess it's that way with most of us" (135). He wants no grand gestures of language from Abel, and, in fact, with the exception of the Night Chant prayer, perhaps, focuses his attention on "ordinary" acts of language: the two of them making "a kind of joke out of" the reservation, talking "about the funny things that had happened to us" (144); and, in one instance, suggests his disdain for Abel's sexually suggestive comments regarding Milly, but "never said anything when he talked like that" because it "would have been worse if I had" (143).

Benally is perhaps the best critic of Abel we have available. Much of the criticism tends to focus on him insofar as he *contributes* to Abel's "healing," and not as someone who offers a perspective on Abel that avoids the kind of therapeutic gestures characteristic of the criticism. Benally offers a humility unique to approaches to Abel as well in that he does not attempt to "diagnose" Abel with any certainty: he knows there are troubles, but he does not dare articulate exactly what those might be. In this way he does

not quite fit the usual interpretation of the Arrowmaker, but he does seem to correlate to some degrees with Warrior's. Warrior emphasizes the Arrowmaker's ability to trust himself and his experiences in order to "remain in the ordinariness requisite to keep those shadows at bay long enough to respond to them rightly" (177). "Rightly," as applied to Abel, might mean acceptance of Abel's silence and inarticulation as part of his being, of his way of existing in the world, without recourse to pathologizing such conditions. Even in the most dramatic gestures of language, his recitation of the Night Chant prayer, presumably for Abel's benefit, Benally keeps "it down because [he] didn't want anybody but him to hear it" (129). The low-key quality of its enunciation though is perhaps not as important as the way he imagines its purposes. Although he shares with Abel what he thinks those songs are about, he never explains to him what all these references to "restoration" mean exactly. Yet, the criticism often takes from the Night Chant ideas of restoration having to do with articulation, thus reinforcing and making possible the "coming to voice" motif often imposed on the narrative. With what authority they make these proclamations is never put into question, even though Benally never invests such authority in himself. Significantly, in the last paragraph of the novel, we witness Abel repeating Benally's recitation, but doing so, curiously, with "no sound" and "no voice" (185). Restoration, here, might mean coming into acceptance of one's own silent being in the world, a perspective offered by Benally himself with respect to Abel.

If silence is relevant at all to the novel, it may be tempting to see it as simply a small matter of interaction among characters, particularly in the way that it establishes connections to people at the same time that language yields similar powers, but it goes further than this: the world we inhabit in *House Made of Dawn* is one already made of

silence; it is constitutive of the landscape; and serves as a significant organizing principle of the narrative. Even Tosamah makes the case about the worldliness of silence. Near the end of his sermon, Tosamah once again reflects on the Apostle John's declaration – "In the beginning was the Word" – by proclaiming: "The Word did not come into being, but it was. It did not break upon the silence, but it was older than the silence and the silence was made of it" (86). Though perhaps imagining silence as a lesser counterpart to the Word, there seems to be a near indistinguishability between the Word and silence as "instruments of creation" making the universe possible.

Significantly, Momaday himself has not been entirely silent on the issue of silence. In *Ancestral Voice*, in response to Charles Woodard's comment about talking "too much these days," Momaday remarks that "we do go too far in language" and "we don't always understand that we can use language moderately, and judiciously, and achieve great results" (106-7). He continues, "I think it is human nature to believe that we have not made our point, have not said enough, and so we go too far" (107). Based on these comments, it may seem that Tosamah's characterization is deprecating, seeing as he tends to "go too far in language." Issues of moderate uses of language aside, Momaday makes some rather astounding comments about silence: "silence reminds us of our isolation"; "the great value of silence, it seems to me, is loneliness"; and in the solitude silence provides "we see that we take ourselves too seriously [and] the self becomes incidental … one achieves a state of selflessness" (107). Lamenting that "silence has become an embarrassment," Momaday says that "not enough of us really appreciate silence for what it is. It is a great restorative, and a very good and creative condition [and] the relationship between sound and silence is always very much in [great

poets'] minds, and that's good" (109). Two ideas that come from his discussion with Woodard – that silence is valuable for reminding us of our loneliness and that silence is restorative and creative – do not cohere neatly, or even at all, with much of the criticism on Momaday.

These ideas cohere in the novel, I suggest, not just in the way that Momaday imbues Abel's experiences with silence, but in the way that he makes silence an important feature of the world *House Made of Dawn* creates, an aspect consistently ignored or denigrated in the criticism. Firstly, Momaday's claim that the great value of silence is loneliness runs contrary to the overwhelmingly shared assumption that a communal ethos, one that teeters on the edge of obsession with "interconnectedness," "balance," "harmony," and other related keywords, defines the heart of the novel and Native literature itself. Yet, loneliness, solitude, and silence feature prominently in the approaches to nearly every character in the novel and, significantly, Abel's "condition" serves as an organizing force helping to clarify their relationship to these aspects of themselves.

For example, Milly, whose job as a social worker is to facilitate Abel's integration into the "normal" life Relocation purports to make available, holds a certain reverence for the tests and surveys she administers to Abel and Benally, portions of which we see left blank (92,94), all of which cohere to certain acts of language dictated by policy. Milly's beliefs in "tests, questions and answers, words on paper" (94) dissipate by way of Abel's disposition. Momaday notes that Milly had lived in LA for four year and "had not talked to anyone" (107). "Talk" here means talking that goes beyond everyday chitchat: greeting, joking, wishing well, "anything that mattered in the least" (107), the latter of

which, as Momaday might have it, allows her to lose herself in activity and thus "destroy our loneliness in the process" (Woodard 107). After a short time knowing each other, Abel's inability to articulate ("He was saying something, trying to tell her why he had come") prompts a realization that they both were lonely, "how unspeakably lonely" (107). As with Angela, she seems to experience a moment of introspection, looking insider herself and seeing her own pain and loneliness, as a result of the influence of silence, particularly Abel's use of it, no matter the degree he has control or awareness of it. Of course, the past few decades of criticism have constructed this as pathological: silence and solitude are anathema to a proper Indian ethic. However, Abel functions in some ways as the Arrowmaker's presumed enemy: his silence shapes the world around him, it gives it meaning, and allows others to come to some sense of their own relationship to that world.

Momaday broadens the scope of silence by way of certain fictional techniques he chooses to employ in the novel. In the penultimate chapter of "The Longhair" section, Momaday's narrator roves about the town, following people from around noon to dusk to evening as a thunderstorm builds up. The chapter features varying responses to the "relationship between sound and silence" through the limited, third-person perspectives of Father Olguin, Angela, Francisco, Abel, and Juan. We begin with Olguin, and he observes that the "weight of silence" (63) has been uncharacteristically disrupted by the sounds of people in the town. In an encounter with Angela, he becomes embarrassed by his continual speaking, perhaps brought about by her coming to the door "without speaking," and falls silent, aware of her behind him. After mocking him, or having been perceived to be mocking him as a result of her laughter, "nothing … but her voice"

horrifies him, and, as he leaves and goes about the town, "the walls of the town rang out with laughter and enclosed him all around" (65).

This section seems to suggest some ambivalence about sound and silence: on the one hand, silence is altogether routine for Olguin; in fact, sound sometimes horrifies him – as suggested by the grotesque imagery Momaday employs during his trip throughout the town –and silence serves as a cause and effect of his embarrassment and loneliness. Significantly, we learn that nearly seven years after this day, Olguin reflects on his "com[ing] to terms with the town" by way of his "exclusive silence," which he imagines as an "example of piety" and chooses to imagine his "certain exclusion" and "estrangement" as "brought about by his own design, his act of renunciation, not the town's" (170). Once again we see a character situating himself in relation to the world around him through silence. Parallel to Olguin's day in the town, as the storm gains momentum, an "intense wake of sound" engulfs Angela, at first causing her to cower, and then prompting her to open the doors and look at the storm head-on. In a "transfixed" state, she closes her eyes and "could still hear and feel [the rain] so perfectly as to conceive of nothing else," the effect of which is to obliterate "all the mean and myriad fears that had laid hold of her in the past" (67). While the sounds of the day terrify Olguin, Angela finds some comfort in the "great avalanche of sound" about her (67). Francisco too delights in the sounds surrounding him, including the children and talk and songs surrounding the kiva. Abel's experience is the most startling in that, provoked by Juan's speaking to him, he kills Juan amidst the "black infinity of sound and silence" (73).

The powers of Momaday's fiction gain their strength, in this case, because, in a single chapter, he's able to describe a world that is made up of sounds and silences that comfort, bring perspective, terrify, console, prompt action and inaction, and that are irreducible. Sound and silence deflect ossification and easy articulation. Momaday further establishes their necessary existence by describing the landscape in terms of silence, quietness, remoteness, stillness and other descriptors often not made readily available in the criticism, most powerfully so in the "establishing shots" of nearly every chapter. The descriptions are startling in that Momaday at times veers away from what might be called human concerns, something we might deem as necessary for a character-driven novel, choosing instead to enmesh the reader in the realities of the landscape. This is particularly significant given critics', most especially Teuton's and Donovan's, insistence on a healing trajectory that depends on Abel's appropriate relationship with the land. Donovan, for example, claims that "Abel's healing can take place only in his own landscape" (79). And Teuton claims that the "power of language to create a world mediates between American Indians and the land" (53), and this can be ethically achieved only in accordance with a correspondence with "proper motion." Yet, given all the ways Momaday invests silence and inaction into the landscape, it is curious how critics like these come to the conclusion that language and motion are requisites for Indian identity and wellness and, further, how inaction somehow relates to pathological passivity. As a result, the question for Abel often amounts to whether or not, or to what degree, Abel comes to voice and situates himself in the world with respect to certain actions. Instead, given what Momaday has said about silence in the interviews with Woodard, we might ask whether or not, or to what degree, Abel has come into a relationship with a world that

is silent and not silent, active and inactive. With all the ambiguity Momaday bestows upon the text, it is difficult to answer either question with certainty. But I find it compelling that, at the end of the novel, Abel finds himself alone, not quite as agile as Teuton would probably like him to be, and not quite articulate either. He begins to sing the "restoration" song given to him by Benally, but does so with no sound and no voice. The best that could be said about Abel, perhaps, is that – not in the end, nor the beginning, but throughout and in varying ways – his condition could be of his own choosing and he could accept it as a way of being in the world; his silence and his speaking offer no guarantees of protecting or destroying him.

No matter how we interpret the successes and failures of Abel and his journey in the narrative, the very presence of silence in the landscape, in relationships, in Momaday's philosophy of experience, and so on, unsettle easy formulations we might hold about the values of coming to voice. Whether or not speaking or remaining silent are good or bad, helpful or not, may not be the types of questions to pursue. Rather, we might consider what integrity, even dignity, there might be found in inactivity, silence, and other seeming failures.

Tolerating Elsie's Silence

When it comes to the fate of the protagonist, Elsie Roberts, in Frances Washburn's novel *Elsie's Business*, there exists no ambiguity: she dies. In fact, the novel announces her murder early on; the readers need not puzzle about her development beyond the closing pages as they do with Abel. While their protagonists' fates differ, both Momaday and Washburn craft stories around subjects whose voices – inarticulate, sparse, muted – place them in peculiar relation to "tradition": in some ways estranged, in others right in line. Again, we have an example of an author who has taken on the task of writing a novel in which the protagonist barely speaks. To a greater degree than *House Made of Dawn*, *Elsie's Business* puts forth an examination of silence and articulation that moves beyond the singular habits of its protagonist and extends into a meditation on the articulable limits of storytelling itself, achieved by way of narrative techniques of uncertainty that have the effect of creating agony and discomfort on behalf of both readers and the characters in the fictional world Washburn presents. This is both a compelling and controversial feature because it confounds the expectations of the mystery genre the novel loosely inhabits: the use of second and third person voice problematizes narrative authority; the topic is bleak – the story of a young woman who is beaten, raped, infantilized, and murdered; the story takes on a tragic form rather than melodramatic; Washburn offers no resolution to the central "mystery" of who murdered Elsie.

Elsie's Business essentially follows two plots: the first described in second person, taking place in Jackson, South Dakota in early 1970, and the second described in third person, taking place in Mobridge and Jackson from the years 1967 to 1970, and

occasionally taking detours into previous decades. Washburn describes the geography of Jackson along the lines of small businesses – diners, plants, and so on – and the "Indian parts of town" – the tribal housing project, as an example. The two plots intersect in the final pages of the novel, in which a character from both puts into action what would best be called the novel's resolution. The finer points of the first plot, in the "present," reveal themselves by novel's end. It follows the motif of "a stranger comes to town." The protagonist – and this is a contested term in the novel's structure – of these sections of the novel we find out is the father of Elsie, the protagonist of the other sections. A recently retired black migrant worker, George Washington comes into town to find out more about his daughter, relying primarily on Oscar DuCharme, an elder in the community who takes in George as a guest. In addition, Nancy Marks appears in both plots, relaying additional information to George. While waiting on paperwork to make its way through the bureaucratic maze in Jackson in order to exhume Elsie's body, George listens to both Oscar and Nancy's versions of "Elsie's business." By the end, George has confronted Jack Mason, the father of two boys who assaulted Elsie. In a twist, Mason pays for Elsie's exhumation, and George takes her away, to his "home," a place never explicitly named. The second plot entails Elsie's move from Mobridge to Jackson. On the same night that Elsie suffers a brutal beating and sexual assault, her mother dies. This plot, then, is bookend by women's deaths. Following from these events in 1967, Elsie moves from Mobridge to Jackson, under the presumed guardianship of Nancy. In Jackson, we follow Elsie and Nancy as their lives have been affected by previous events. After an affair with the town drunk, and after other disastrous experiences with men, Elsie is found murdered. Again, it is difficult to definitively name a protagonist here, but at least

four can said to be in competition for the role: George and Oscar in the present, and Elsie and Nancy in the past.

The sources for Elsie's story, however, constitute oral genres directly culled from the fictive world. There are communal dimensions to the enterprise of storytelling in *Elsie's Business* that stand apart from Momaday's aesthetic choices. We are presented with Abel as a subject by way of extended forays into limited-omniscient, impersonal, third-person narrative accounts, journal entries, and first-person stream of consciousness ramblings. The authority for genres of telling do not become points of contention in *House Made of Dawn*. Washburn announces the "latest gossip," "the old stories as well as the new ones" coming from "the grandfathers" as a means to know "more about Elsie's story," more than what the "official reports" can give us (1). The title supplies a subject and a motivation: people in this world are drawn to Elsie's story, have many variations of telling it, and we too might become invested in digging into Elsie's business. Consistent with arguments made by Scarberry-Garcia in *Landmarks of Healing*, Washburn, like Momaday, uses elements of oral tradition to construct the novel and, importantly, chooses to depart from them. The difference in Washburn's execution of this strategy is that certain characters within the fictive world are well aware of their use of this technique in telling Elsie's story. Thus, the novel is conscious of its use, an aspect made bolder by way of its exploration of its bleak topic. What's addressed here is not just a question of how culture and tradition apply to the inner life of people, and their psychological and spiritual integrity, but how these might be applied in analyzing dimensions of communal responses to pressing social issues such as violence perpetrated against women. Furthermore, the novel explores ways in which "culture" and "tradition,"

when inflexible, maintain, even promote, silences concerning social realities. Washburn treats the ethics of silence as both subject and method.

The subject of violence perpetrated against indigenous women has long been of significance in written Native women's literature, particularly in autobiographical modes in the last two decades or so. Unique to *Elsie's Business* is its treatment of the subject. The novel foregoes presenting a clear point of view on the matter, yet violent acts stand starkly in the foreground. The second chapter, for example, details the rape and beating of Elsie, our introduction to the protagonist. (For readers familiar with Native literature, this chapter may read as a brutal version of the opening scene in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*.) The treatment of violence remains intolerable because Washburn offers no justice, and its sense of closure is meek and ambiguous. The heightened sense of tragedy the story brings to bear by way of maintaining certain silences and uncertainty signals a key difference within the network of Native women's writing that has sought to center a discourse of testimony regarding sexual and gender violence. Generating no readily recognizable form of redemption or justice leaves the reader feeling uncomfortable, unsure of what to make of the purpose in telling such a story that, by its end, has not even offered the truth of what happens to its protagonist. This distressing feature of the novel risks asking questions concerning the ways literature can *articulate* the "truth" of experience, as well as what readers might make of the dignity of silences.

The controversy I see the novel possibly generating involves the way these silences – both Elsie's and the narrative effects of silence - contest the means and ends of both community and empathy, conventionally received, when it comes to representations of sexual and gendered violence in Native American literature. This is significant given

that the novel foregrounds sexual violence to a greater degree than many novels before it, and yet maintains the centrality of silence, uncertainty, and tragedy. I argue that the novel emphasizes distressing features of silence in order to illuminate the limits of articulation in bringing about order and closure. The value of *Elsie's Business*, as I see it, is the way Washburn challenges readers to tolerate silence.

Published in 2006, the novel has received no substantial critical treatment in print, except for a nod from Jace Weaver in his "More Light than Heat." Given this lack of commentary, I explore Washburn's treatment of silence by contextualizing *Elsie's Business* within criticism that has sought to sketch out the responsibilities of writers to issues of representation. There are several questions addressed here. First, what responsibilities do authors have in terms of representing Indian communities? How might we interpret these representations? Second, what responsibilities do authors have toward representations of sexual and gendered violence? How might these representations be interpreted along the lines of community, justice, and healing? Third, what responsibilities do authors have in terms of promoting identification and empathy on behalf of readers? What, for example, qualities should a protagonist possess so that we may identify with her? What might be the expectations and outcomes concerning representations of community and violence that intend to promote identification and empathy? To address these three sets of questions, as well as their interrelatedness, I examine various critics' responses, attempt to outline and critique the assumptions undergirding their arguments, sketch these out in relation to *Elsie's Business*, and then explore what challenges and transformations the novel brings to the table.

In arguments attempting to define Native literature, critics have consistently posited a communal ethos of shared values as a central characteristic. The opening chapter of the novel riffs on tropes of Native community in its description of elder wisdom among the "grandfathers," as well as Oscar DuCharme's (one of these elders) recitation of a traditional oral story. It seems an endearing portrait that the rest of the novel reframes by way of more radical narrative strategies. What "wisdom" there is to be found in community remains a question rather than a presumption. One of the most notable statements on this issue of the relationship between community and literature comes from Jace Weaver, in his monograph *That the People Might Live*, who coins the neologism "communitism": a combination of community and activism. Contending that it is the "single thing that most defines Indian literatures," he argues that "literature is communitist to the extent that it has a proactive commitment to Native community" (43). "To promote communitist values," he explains, "means to participate in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them" (43). One of the difficulties in understanding the implications of this definition has to do with Weaver's identification of a tension between oral and written literatures in delineating a communal voice. Interestingly, the very first paragraph of the novel brings up this issue: the difference in information gleaned from "official" reports and "unofficial" accounts, coming from gossip, rumor, and the elders' stories. For Weaver, traditional stories are communal in that they "belong to the people and define the people – the community – as a whole" (42). As a result, he suggests, the "notion of a story with a single author, especially one who then has a proprietary right in the act of his or her creation, would have struck pre-Columbian Natives as absurd" (42). Contemporary

writers, however, are "self-appointed": "put[ting] one's authorial signature on a text is to immediately put oneself outside the oral tradition and community" (42). Since written texts, presumably, are not authorized by a community, they cannot speak for the people. Again, the novel's opening riffs on this idea: "If you want to know more about Elsie's story than just the official reports you have to ask one of the grandfathers" (1). Weaver, however, cannot seem to uphold this binarism of oral and written literatures: he insists on defining written Native literatures as "dialogic texts that both reflect and shape Native identity and community" (41). Even more, contemporary Native writers, he contends, "continue, supplement, and expand the oral tradition, nourishing it while being nourished by it" even though their self-appointed status marks them as outside of it (41).

The confusion regarding insiders and outsider notwithstanding, what is important for Weaver's argument about "communitism" is that it be understood as both sustaining and affirming community. For him, the stakes are high: "Not to be committed to Native American community, affirming tribes, the people, the values, is tantamount to psychic suicide. It is to lose the self in the dominant mass humanity, either ceasing to be or persisting merely as another ethnic minority, drifting with no place, no relations, no real people" (43). In Weaver's estimation, it would seem, Native writers – more so than other storytellers, for whatever reason – hold an "accountability to Native community" (42) that necessitates an appeal to the good of the community the writer wishes to capture in written language. The ethical argument Weaver makes conjures an image of the Native writer beholden to the will of the people with seemingly no backbone, or worse, creativity, of her own. Writing becomes a rather sterile affair, an exercise in propaganda and aggrandizement with no value but to make people feel good about themselves. The

absurdity to which I reduce Weaver's argument, perhaps unfairly, holds sway in contemporary literary circles. It has become commonplace to define Native literatures, and criticism about them, along the lines of these "communitist" appeals. Doing otherwise, it might be said, risks forfeiting written Native literatures' distinctiveness. This need not be the case. To look at Native literatures otherwise, that is, to consider them for the many ways they might be deliberately silent, maybe even playfully so, on matters of community and values offers some nuance to the task of defining them. The "affirmative" aspect of literature is but one of many to uphold. I want to address here some of the assumptions regarding this type of argument in terms of the responsibilities of writers and readers, and later return to them in a closer reading of *Elsie's Business*.

One assumption undergirding arguments like Weaver's is that a sense of a writer's "accountability" to community entails subordination to it. While humility, respect, and even affirmation, might be worthwhile aspects of creative endeavors, defining writers' responsibilities in this way seems to place limits on what might very well be valuable aspects of literature. It does not seem too disagreeable a point that a writer's obligation toward representation of community would involve critique, making targets, so to speak, of communal "values" that might be in need of criticism and satire. In Native literary studies, I would suggest, this has been somewhat of a difficult line of reasoning to follow given that a primary premise is that "authentic" Native culture and community can do no harm. If these are less than beneficent, according to Weaver, the malignancy of such would best be attributed to the fracturing "effects of more than 500 years of colonialism" (43). What gets left out of Weaver's approach is a consideration of the agency of communities that utilize "tradition" and "culture" – including, for example,

orature and ceremony – to create grief, exile, dysfunction, and other negative features often attributed solely to "colonialism." Writing itself, too, serves as an "activist" element in Native communities (insofar as it is not set up in opposition to "orature"). Constitutions, for example, play a powerful part in defining the polities they describe. They are examples of a genre "authorized" by a community in order to delineate citizenship, rights, and other aspects of sovereignty. The genre's "proactive commitment" to community is not a guarantee. In this sense, the "activism" that is constitutive of Native community might be considered for all the actions it takes: tradition is vibrantly active and productive because it has the power to restore and destroy. This comes up in *Elsie's Business* toward its end when members of the Lakota community hold a "wiping the tears" ceremony, a performance of a kind of exile, as I will argue, that masquerades as mourning and remembrance. Even more, the novel explores ways in which tradition fails to speak to certain issues, namely the violence suffered by Elsie.

Affirmative approaches to community, like Weaver's, tend to subordinate the individual to the community, suggesting that assertion of personal authority runs the risk of promoting a "rugged individualism" consistent with a non- and anti-Indian American ethos. Weaver, for example, argues that "there is no practice of Native religions for personal empowerment," and so, it would seem to follow, that contemporary Native writers follow in the same vein: they "write that the People might live" (45), forsaking individual interests. My arguments insist on a skepticism regarding this guiding assumption in Native literary studies that privileges a "We" over an "I." As I've suggested in the previous chapter on *House Made of Dawn*, and as I will argue in relation

to *Elsie's Business,* Native literary studies might be recalibrated in order to consider how individual acts of agency, perhaps related to restoration, recovery, and so on, might be exercised within and without communal and traditional contexts. Elsie's voice does not conform to communal or readerly expectations. I think in some sense I'm simply trying to call attention to these "weird" protagonists we find all over Native literature that tend to get cast as "typical" or in need of some form of normalization. They don't talk right. They don't act right. Why must these literary figures be exemplary? Significantly, I think, the elders of the two novels, Oscar and Tosamah, can become objects of derision in their position of authority, especially in that their ways of speaking, in both form and content, contrast sharply with those of the protagonists. Why one set of values related to speaking and articulation has to win out over another is unclear. It is this impulse to favor authentic speech that the novel questions. The dynamism of Native literary expression need not be thought of exclusively along these lines of commitment to community. There are ways in which "writing prepares the ground for recovery, and even re-creation, of Indian identity and culture" (Weaver 44) without recourse to affirmation of tradition, culture, and community.

Feminist approaches within Native American studies have been energetic in offering challenges to the appeal to a beneficent community. Especially powerful in the field are critics who take up the task of analyzing sexual and gendered violence perpetrated against Native women within the contexts of colonialism and tribal sovereign frameworks. These critics have taken to task voices within their own communities, coming primarily from male tribal elders, who assert that activism regarding sexual violence detracts from the "real" work of establishing tribal sovereignty and autonomy.

Some feminist critics contest the notion that "women's issues" are subordinate to the integrity of the tribal national community as a whole. Native feminist literary criticism inaugurated by Paula Gunn Allen in her *The Sacred Hoop* has sought to "recover the feminine" in American Indian traditions and examine how the continuity of such has influenced contemporary exercises in poetry and fiction writing. This literary criticism is coextensive with other feminist-inflected projects in that it challenges the idea that the male voice, dominant in discussions of Native written literature, holds all authority in communicating and expressing Native culture. Allen emboldens this line of reasoning when she opines that "traditional tribal lifestyles are more often gynocratic than not, and they are never patriarchal" (2). The modifier "traditional" here, of course, signifies that we've somehow *lost our way* since then; nevertheless, Allen's arguments suggest that Native literatures can be defined, received, and created along the lines of gender, and that's a significant feature that has been left out of many discussions. The degree to which *Elsie's Business* can be said to contribute to the work of "recovering the feminine" is difficult to argue given that 1) though the traditional stories told in the novel feature women, they are told by men, and 2) Native women, with the exception of Elsie, are notably absent or minimized in the story. Nevertheless, the absence of a "strong" Native woman voice, and the presence of a more subdued one, puts pressure on the question of the value of voice itself.

Subverting male dominance, and recovering the feminine in literary traditions, once again suggest a criticism that depends much on affirmation. To set the stage for considering the saliency of Elsie's silence and the difficulties it causes with reference to affirmative approaches, we should consider the context of feminist approaches to Native

women's writing that attempt to construct literature as alternative historiographies and modes of indigenous-centered testimony. For example, Dian Million, in her essay "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History," presents the argument that Indian perspectives on colonialism, particularly among First Nations women in Canada, have been both silenced and treated as inferior due to their supposed subjectivity, emotional irrationality, and appeal to victimization. To counter these "colonizing" approaches, she asserts a "Native discursive autonomy" (60) that utilizes "emotional knowledge" of experience as an "alternative truth" (64), thus delineating a body of "felt history" among Native women's writing. Her examples include fictional and autobiographical narratives by women that employ the "felt experience" of shame and anger, validating these affects as truthful and historical. Though the article is light on close readings, and concerns itself more with historical rather than literary matters, she suggests that the testimonial powers of these writings are at their most intense when they utilize non-academic language. She claims that Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed,* for example, "appeals as a history that can be felt as well as intellectualized" because it is a "plain-spoken narrative" using "personalized language" (59). For Million, the value of Native women's literature is that it resists silence and silencing, it tells us something about the truth of experience through narrative techniques and emotional appeals. Following from work like this, we would need to evaluate a novel like *Elsie's Business* with reference to criteria involving, at the very least, the presence of a woman's voice that is both communicative and affective.

In contrast to Weaver, what makes Million's approach to Native literature interesting, I think, is that it attempts to demonstrate how it might "participate in the

healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them" (Weaver 43) with an emphasis on the latter. And it does this, it would seem, without authorization by a community, without demonstrating the absolute need for "accountability" to it, and without a clear connection to traditional practices of storytelling. Further, what is significant in Million's account is the way that certain narrative techniques, the construction of persona in fiction and autobiography, for example, point to the productivity of emotion and affect, elements of the reading experience seemingly untouched by Weaver.

There are a few assumptions undergirding her argument, however, that I want to tease out and problematize in relation to the way they might construct responsibilities of writers toward representing sexual violence. First, Million assumes that literary techniques are quite effective in communicating experiences and triggering affects. The presence of such techniques in the texts she examines is no guarantee of interpersonal communication between writer and reader. Ideal readers are not always actual readers. The value of Native literature need not be reduced to its ability to communicate feelings. I'm not invoking here the well-worn notion of the "affective fallacy," but suggesting that while the critic may be attentive to matters of the relationship between text and emotive response, the reader is not necessarily engaged in this interpersonal bridge. The text mediates the relationship between writer and reader as well. Writers like Momaday and Washburn, for example, utilize narrative techniques of inaccessibility that offer some distance from the affective experiences of their characters. The appearance of Washburn's protagonist is sparse, and she makes no extended monologue to cue the reader into knowing with any certainty what exactly she feels. Whatever successes

authors might achieve in terms of making available for readers emotional experiences, there is no guarantee what exactly readers will do with them. I would guess that an underlying motivation for Million's argument is the promotion of empathy and identification. The reason Native women writers would access anger and shame, for example, is that it would allow readers to understand the lived experience of these emotions and, importantly, to feel these themselves. The assumption here is that empathy and identification are necessary features of Native literature, and following from this, it is the writers' responsibility to promote these as much as they can. This, presumably, would offer possibilities for the activist component of Native literature.

To the first point, following Million's argument, a novel like *Elsie's Business* would be judged along the lines of its ability to grant access to the emotional experiences of Elsie through first-person narration and testimonial discourse. The novel resists this tendency in several ways, thus putting into question how well it would fit into Million's evaluation. Washburn does not use first-person voice, a technique that would presumably give us greater insight into the protagonist Elsie Robert's experiences. Even more troubling, perhaps, is the way Washburn alternates between second and third person voice. The problem with this narrative strategy is that it is entirely unclear what authority might be attributed to the stories we are told about Elsie. The very first paragraph of the novel presents readers with its own schema of inaccessibility: "If you want to know more about Elsie's story than just the official reports you have to ask one of the grandfathers, because they know all the old stories as well as the new ones, the latest gossip, and sometimes it's all the same stories happening over and over. Someone just changes things up a little bit, a name here, a place here. Elsie's story could go any which of a

way" (1). From the beginning, we know we will not be treated to anything resembling an objective account of Elsie's story because no mode of telling, even the "official reports," can offer a complete telling. The page space allotted to representation of Elsie also contributes to storytelling obscurity. Additionally, the frame narrative and the fragmented story-within-the-story actually offer up two characters who could be imagined as both in the running for role of protagonist. This presents a problem in terms of access to emotional experience in that narrative structure itself plays a role in prompting identification, and this protagonist whose centrality to the story is uncertain in terms of form does not say much.

As the novel unfolds, we learn more about Elsie by way of Oscar DuCharme, an elderly grandfather figure, and Nancy Marks, a non-Indian woman who helps Elsie adjust to life in the town of Jackson. The first chapter, somewhat ironically, attempts to establish the authority of Oscar since he explains that "We are all related in that way, Elsie was my niece in that Indian way, but not white man way. Indian way that makes her your cousin, everybody's relative" (4). The claim to kinship, and thus an appeal to authority, is peculiar because nowhere in the novel does Oscar ever tell us of any time he actually met with Elsie. Given this incongruity, the narrative technique, at least Oscar's role in it, creates a distancing and alienating effect. The kinship claim speaks to the reader as a trope of authenticity, and at the same time marks itself as an empty gesture, when examined in light of evidence from the novel. This strategy of invoking a trope and then dismissing or undermining it plays throughout. Washburn veers from the testimonial discourse we might expect in such a novel. Washburn, it would seem, has little interest in creating Elsie's life of the mind. Elsie never even mentions Oscar.

Instead, Elsie's thoughts are never rendered and the lack of an interior perspective frustrates readerly expectations for testimony, not to mention emotional vibrancy. These aspects of Elsie's character are, for the most part, withheld from us.

To the second point, the novel tends to block opportunities for empathetic identification. This, for me, is what makes *Elsie's Business* controversial and intriguing. It invites the reader in for a close examination by way of the second-person voice, but even with such intimacy it remains silent on certain points dictated by conventions of the genre it inhabits. Understanding with whom we are to identify with becomes a problem because of the lack of a clearly defined protagonist. Despite the ubiquity of obscurantist narrative techniques, however, it has become commonplace to assume that one of the values of literature is the way it promotes empathy. In her book *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), Suzanne Keen describes how critics argue value literature in this way. Her arguments are striking in that she challenges the altruism hypothesis, the idea that empathy prompted by novel reading leads to pro-social outcomes. In addition, she observes that critics often miss out on the ways that certain literary techniques serve as obstacles to empathy. One of these obstacles involves personal distress, a prominent feature of Washburn's novel, which amounts to the anxiety placed on a reader when confronted with terror, or some other related negative affect, that stifles mutual feeling and diminishes interest in continuing reading. Readers readily equipped with the powers of empathy often overcome these types of obstacles and push on, but this is achieved by way of the breaking of the "social contract," a phrase Keen uses: the reader does not, and could not, feel responsibility toward non-existent entities, but the "suspension of disbelief" allows readers to imagine so. In consideration of the tension between readers'

expectations and the question of justice in novel reading, readers push through with the hopes – based, perhaps, on narrative conventions of closure - that some avatar – whether a protagonist or supporting character in the narrative mirroring the concerns of the readers or author – performs certain actions that would bring about redemption, thus alleviating personal distress, and, by extension, offering the possibilities for empathetic identification. Critics of Native literature tend to uphold this expectation as a central feature of a writer's ability to promote healing.

In terms of the representations of sexual violence in Native American novels, as Million might have it, a necessary feature of a novel like Washburn's would be the articulation of the trauma experienced by the protagonist, either by some compassionate authority figure or kin, or the protagonist herself, often constructed as a kind of "talking cure," or more appropriately, testimony that purges the negative affects related to the trauma, and thus leads to a sense of justice and "healing." The centrality of Elsie's silence and the responses to it, however, make the novel a puzzling read in the context of literary criticism that has constructed testimonial discourse as a necessary feature for promoting justice and indigenous-centered histories. Washburn creates a portrait of a subject whose agency can be discerned by what she does more so than what she says. While demands are made on her to speak in certain ways regarding her experiences, Elsie indulges in her own peculiar activities and forms of articulation and silence. Her inability or refusal to conform to norms of articulation frustrate, even irritate, those around her. The novel is structured around the gaps or silences that others feel they must fill in for her. Various parties make certain jurisdictional claims about why she should speak. This comes across most powerfully in Washburn's description of Nancy Marks, the white woman in Jackson

who serves as a kind of guardian to Elsie. Nancy takes upon herself the responsibility to articulate the trauma experienced by Elsie, finding herself continually clarifying to herself and others the "truth" of an experience that is not her own. It is at these points in the novel that Washburn features a character attempting to break the silence, yet doing so in ways that are self-interested and off-putting. The voice that resonates most strongly in the novel is also the most suspect. This irony serves well in disrupting readers' expectations concerning any "talking cure" on behalf of the protagonist, a desire announced by Nancy herself importantly.

I suggest that the intolerability of silence the novel may or may not lampoon reflects a degree of interest in the limitations of the concerns announced by critics like Weaver and Million who insist on defining what Native literature should do, especially with reference to how cultural heritage serves as a discourse of truth and power. The premise and form of the story apply pressure to certain formulations we have come to expect of Native literature. Contrary to these expectations, the novel refuses to demonstrate the efficiency of Indian communities in promoting healing, suggests that "oral tradition" may not be always serve as an adequate resource for promoting justice or even telling a story about Elsie, and refuses to give into readers' expectations regarding the promotion of empathy. In this sense, one of the values of Elsie's estrangement from more familiar forms articulation is that it demonstrates the power of Janice Gould's claim that though patriarchy demands silencing, "there are places within the psyche that can and must remain beautifully inarticulate and mute" (43). "I would like to think," she continues, "there is a vast reserve of silence that can never be colonized, that can never be taught to speak" (43). What remains is the question of how well a novel can dramatize

the causes and effects of antagonism in Indian country while maintaining an allegiance to the dignity of a "vast reserve of silence."

Though Elsie's perspective remains distant from readers due to narrative inaccessibility, she serves a central role in the novel as it is structured on how certain representatives of various institutions evaluate her agency, particularly its consequences, in relation to the power structures of communities she inhabits and affects. The movement of Elsie throughout the novel is tracked by way of institutional "hand-offs," her being shuffled through various institutions of power. In these cases the question of what to do with Elsie is often determined by what are perceived as her levels of intelligibility; moreover, actions taken on her behalf or against her are often structured on her ability to speak, and, significantly, it is often her silence that prompts frustration and intolerability. There are at least six communal elements to take into consideration as we follow Elsie's journey from life to death in the novel: 1) the treatment of the body in medical institutions, 2) law enforcement and its political entanglements, figured by the sheriffs and other leaders, 3) a non-specific universalizing feminism figured by Nancy Marks, 4) the church, 5) "traditional" affiliation, announced by Oscar in the novel's opening pages, and 6) paternal rights of ownership, a driving motivation for telling Elsie's story as a whole. In each of these, Elsie's peculiar ways of speaking and remaining silent put into question what authority others imagine to have over her and, in addition, what is to be made of her agency.

A significant feature in the novel involves the way that peoples' desires for Elsie to speak are inconsistent. In the first few chapters detailing the aftermath of her rape and beating, Elsie's ability to name her attackers becomes a contentious issue for her doctor

and the sheriff, suggesting an unclear route to justice for her victimization. The potential of Elsie's voice emerges in the hospital scene in the fourth chapter. Washburn sets up the doctor as an insensitive and domineering figure who assumes the responsibility for having Elsie's attackers named and their actions subjected to justice. Rather bizarrely, the doctor diagnoses her while she is in a non-communicative state, completely unconscious of what is going on around her. After listing off matter-of-factly the damages done to her body, he tells her: "You're going to live. You're going to walk again, but you'll probably have a hitch in your get-along for the rest of your life. I don't think you're going to talk again, but you'll be able to make some sound" (26). Immediately following, he makes a demand that, in whatever way she might be able to, she tell him "just who the hell did this to you because I want to kill the son of a bitch with my own two hands. I also want to know when you goddamned Indians are going to quit trying to kill each other" (27). On a literal level, the doctor makes demands on a voiceless body. The demands are striking for the way they demonstrate patriarchal and anti-Indian attitudes. The doctor assumes without consent or any input from her what form justice might take – in this case, vigilantism – and assumes that her attackers must be Indian. Furthermore, the doctor presumes his own goodness when it comes to catering to both the needs of his patient and the community. This interaction sets up a dynamic that plays throughout the novel: people talk about Elsie either in her absence or without out much consultation with her at all, and do so as a way to announce their self-righteousness when it comes to the communal good.

The doctor's premise for how and what Elsie will say in response to violence is undermined by the emergence of Elsie's ability to speak. Returning to consciousness

from a dream-like state, to the doctor's surprise, Elsie begins to mumble: "Mmm.Mmmaa … MMMmmaaason" (28-29). Knowing that she can now hear, and discouraging her from continuing to speak, the doctor asks her to blink her eyelids in response to his questions: "are you trying to tell us who did this to you?" and "are you trying to say Mason?" (29). In answering in the affirmative, the doctor expresses surprise: he lifts his eyes from Elsie's face, looks at the sheriff, and exclaims: "Jesus H. Christ." The ability to name her attacker disrupts the doctor's authority over her since he assumed, on one hand, that she would have difficulty in communicating, thus throwing off his initial medical assessment, and on the other hand, naming her attacker as non-Indian white men. For whatever reason, the doctor seems baffled by the possibility that he was incorrect in determining what she would say and regrets, possibly, what she does have to say. This pronouncement informs the issues surrounding justice and what is to be done in relation to Elsie's ability to speak. The typography of Elsie's accusation itself prefigures the types of speech we will encounter from her throughout the novel.

Sheriff Peterson's decisions regarding the question of justice in response to Elsie's victimization exacerbates the issue of self-interestedness and patriarchy that seems to define most peoples' attitudes toward her. At stake in exercising his authority as an enforcer of law is the future of his career. In a conversation with Elsie's nurse, Peterson suggests that "for all practical purposes, justice has already been served" since the men who Elsie claimed had raped her had been killed when a deer stepped in front of their car, forced them off the road and into a tree, killing them (36). "I don't know," he ponders, "if it would serve any purpose to have it all come out now. You can't try dead men, and it wouldn't do Elsie a bit of good anyway. Do you think Jack Mason is going

to stand still for an investigation into what his boys and their friend were up to just before they got killed?" (36). In this sense, Elsie's voice risks endangering the silence and silencing he sees necessary as a way of protecting the integrity of a politically powerful figure in the community, one that holds his future in his hands, not to mention the maintenance of white privilege via law enforcement and the courts. To temper his perspective, he suggests an investigation "wouldn't do Elsie a bit of good anyway," assuming her best interests lie in his decision-making powers (which in this case lie in preserving the integrity of dead white men over a living Native woman's). Moreover, his solution to the problem is to draw from the resources of his church in finding a parish "somewhere away from here" (37) that might take her in. Effectively abdicating his responsibility to her, as well as the local justice system's, he arranges to move her from Mobridge to Jackson, where much of the action of the novel takes place. The Sheriff's disinterestedness may very well serve as a reference to the narrative cliché of a corrupt sheriff in the whodunit genre. This "washing of the hands" becomes a consistent feature among those who presume to take some sense of responsibility toward Elsie, reluctantly or not.

Once in Jackson, the question remains for the reader what forms justice might take since law enforcement has failed Elsie. At this point in the novel, readers might also wonder what forms of articulation Elsie will pursue and who will serve as her interlocutors. To set the stage for exploring these questions, the novel employs the motif of "relocation" familiar to readers of *House Made of Dawn,* in which Nancy Marks emerges as a figure similar to both Ben Benally – in that she appears to be more sympathetic to the protagonist than perhaps any other character – and Millie – in that she

serves as a mediator, in some ways, between the protagonist and the institutions that monitor her. Especially poignant in this regard, Nancy takes issue with Father Horst whose perspective on Elsie Nancy perceives to stem uncritically from moral injunctions passed down from the Catholic Church. From this point on, however, we know that Elsie will die, so readers know the likelihood that the rest of the novel will present a stagnation, rather than acceleration, of justice. Nancy steps in as a character who might help to relieve these anxieties and moderate the arousal of pity and terror the foreknowledge of tragedy might incite. In this way, the saliency of Nancy's voice is heightened. Nancy's sensitivity toward Elsie is underscored by prototypically feminist motivations. In contrast to the jarring patriarchal attitudes of other authority figures, Nancy presumes her role as guardian necessarily involves challenging the propagation of systemic misogyny, and yet does so by speaking on behalf of Elsie. In this way, the power to articulate a pro-feminist agenda comes into question with respect to how Nancy views Elsie's agency. Nancy, like those she attempts to challenge, presents an inconsistency in terms of her desires for Elsie to speak.

The emotional impact of the novel is at its most intense when Nancy expresses indignation concerning the men who want to keep Elsie silent (Sheriffs Peterson and Ed) and those who want to admonish her for certain perceived transgressions (Father Horst). The vibrancy of Nancy's anger, more nuanced than the doctor's, offers access to emotional experience readers are not granted when it comes to Elsie. What fuels her indignation stems from imagining herself as a maternal protector against the machinations of men. The chapter introducing readers to Nancy sets up this parental guardianship. Nancy, the younger sibling to Mary and Margaret who die in infancy,

imagines herself as an "afterthought," going so far as to compare herself to a palimpsest in which the older texts of Mary and Margaret bleed through with more importance to her mother (40). Once Nancy herself becomes pregnant, she imagines the possibility that she was "now inscribed with another life to live" (40). Like her mother, however, she suffers a miscarriage. Following from this, she expresses desire for a child surrogate "unencumbered by the past," by, for example, every year purchasing "fifty chicks" from a hatchery and naming them Mary, Margaret, and Joy; the latter a name she had chosen for her own child (41). Here we have a literal mother hen. Nancy is in need of offspring to excise the ghosts of her maternal past.

In Elsie, Nancy finds a viable candidate for her mothering needs. Elsie's child-like, sparse, and idiosyncratic speech and behavior amp up the potential for Nancy's role in "mothering" Elsie. Previous to their first encounter, the only time we "hear" Elsie speak involves her mumbling "Mason" while in the hospital. After Sheriff Peterson places Elsie in Nancy's care, he notes that Elsie "hasn't spoken a word all the way down here" (43). Bashfully ignoring the Sheriff's "take care" and Nancy's question that they find a place to eat, Elsie finally speaks: "Do you want to see my turtles?" (44). "Her voice," Washburn notes, "came out raspy and hoarse" and "some of the words broke in the middle abruptly changing pitch from low to high" (44). Nancy replies, "I'd very much like that," and the scene plays out as a conversation between an adult and a child: Nancy asking simple questions about the turtles and Elsie demonstrating a bit of her "precociousness," as it might be taken, explaining to Nancy that "these are chrysemys picta marginata turtles," a fact she has learned from "read[ing] books" (45). This dynamic between them, in terms of the way they speak to each other, never falters. Later

in the novel, for example, Elsie's sing-song, presumably child-like, pitch is conveyed typographically - "NoOOo" (98) – mirroring Elsie's similar response in the car: "NNOooo," [her] voice burbled up and down the scale" (48). The representation of speech signals here Nancy's ability to negotiate modes of communication with Elsie, a point of identification others had not been able to achieve. This form of identification, however, might not be so simple as it may seem – all it took was for someone to *really* listen to Elsie – given that Elsie's speech in these instances may not be "natural," they may very well be a response to the role Nancy has pushed Elsie into.

The problem the novel presents is how Nancy evaluates Elsie's capabilities when it comes to asserting her agency, especially in that she's inconsistent in respecting the powers of testimony. For example, Nancy continually insists that Elsie should speak about her experiences, testifying to her abuse, but when Elsie comes to Jackson she follows a protocol similar in some ways to Sheriff Peterson's: Nancy "put[s] out the story that Elsie's mother had died in Mobridge and she had nowhere else to go, a story that," according to Nancy, "satisfied the curious and was, after all, true" (68). In this sense, Nancy imagines herself speaking on behalf of Elsie, protecting her by spinning an insincere story that masks the reality of her situation. Even more strikingly, when, much later in the novel, Elsie tells her of a sexual assault by Mr. Packwood, a citizen of Jackson for whom she cleans house, Nancy opines to herself that there was not a thing to be done about it, "no one would want to hear about it": "Any woman's word, but particularly an Indian woman's word, an Indian woman who was known to have been raped, considered to be not quite bright – no way would talking to Packwood or the sheriff or anyone else do anything but bring Elsie unwanted attention and sympathy for Packwood, even though

everyone knew how he was" (148). When we finally come to a point in the novel in which we find Elsie testifying to her abuse and trauma, conforming to expectations we might have about what is supposed to happen in a story like this, we are told "no one would want to hear about it." When Elsie has finally achieved the kind of voice that Nancy presumably had wished for her, she seems to feel no more investment in the necessity of such testimony.

The irony, then, is that Nancy has wanted, or needed, Elsie to speak because Nancy does not feel she has a voice of her own. Her motivations are not entirely therapeutic. Nancy's interactions with Father Horst, the Catholic priest who has granted Elsie room and board on church property, reveal this particular characteristic, especially in the way that she invokes a universalized, non-specific feminism. The first instance of this occurs when Jack Mason has called Sheriff Ed of Jackson about the possibility of Elsie speaking about his sons' crimes, again a statement of concern about a threat to the status quo of white privilege. When Horst informs Nancy of the developing situation, he advises her to "just make sure that Elsie does keep quiet" (82). Nancy reacts angrily: "Goddamn you! I TOLD you she isn't saying a word, and why would she? I wish to hell she would talk about it! This isn't just about an Indian girl being assaulted by white boys, it's about an ugly crime that men have been committing against women since time began" (82).

The ahistorical premise of Nancy's claim here relates to the problems of the politics of solidarity promoted by Anglo-American feminism, of which Nancy may serve as a representative. In *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Andrea Smith identifies a "politics of inclusion" among mainstream feminists that fails to

address the specificity of Native women's oppression and qualitative experience of violence. Smith also identifies in many activist groups a move toward "cultural competency" which seeks to recognize the importance of difference. As Smith contends, however, it is often "naively assumed," by organizers of such groups, "that 'the culture' of people of color is simple, easy to understand, homogenous, and that such understanding requires little or no substantive engagement with communities" and that, no matter how re-envisioned, "cultural competency is limited … because the lives and histories of women of color call on us to radically rethink all models currently developed for addressing" gender violence (152). The strength of feminist organizing depends on what degree other voices contribute to goal-making and activism. To whatever degree Nancy may represent Anglo-American feminism, her relationship to Elsie has less to do with inclusion, although that's a part of it, and more to do with co-optation of Elsie's experiences to bolster her own point of view.

This sense of co-optation comes to a fore in the second interaction with Horst, wherein he reveals to Nancy that one night he had seen a naked Elsie kissing John Caulfield, the town drunk Elsie briefly has a relationship with. He explains to Nancy that although the "church is adamant against sex outside of marriage" he does not have the authority to do anything about it (141). In addition, he explains, "that such behavior is taking place on church property is outrageous, but it's *Elsie*" (141). Nancy is angered by this and asks Horst to think about it from the "other side": "Who do you think started this whole affair? Surely you can't believe after all the trouble with men that Elsie has been through that *she* would initiate this?" (141). After Elsie tells her of the assault by Packwood, Nancy finds that this "picture, this new information" does not fit with Horst's

tale of a "willing Elsie standing at the back door naked in the middle of the night, kissing John Caulfield … It was like there were two Elsies" (148). The outrageousness of this possible sexual liaison with Caulfield has to do with Nancy seeing Elsie as "an abused and troubled person who may not even be quite right in the head after what happened to her" (143). More to the point, Nancy's bewilderment also seems to stem from the very fact that Elsie would not speak to her about such a relationship or even point of view about sexual desire.

The novel calls into question to what degree and in what manner Elsie may be considered traumatized. An additional layer to the complication of Elsie's trauma has also to do with how her intelligence is perceived and measured. As we've seen previously, Nancy configures Elsie's resiliency by way of certain identity markers that seem to work against her. Note Washburn's stylistic employment of this logic in the cadence of a thought process by Nancy: "Any woman's word, but particularly an Indian woman's word, an Indian woman who was known to have been raped, considered to be not quite bright" (148). From this perspective, Nancy makes assumptions regarding a lack of interest in sex on behalf of a mentally impaired victim of a serious trauma. The pro-feminist stance Nancy flaunts in response to Horst's endorsement of the Church's regulation of sexuality falters when she herself argues Elsie's lack of sexual agency. Nancy makes moral pronouncements on the sex life of someone she sees in need of protection and guardianship. Reigning in sexuality by way of denial and accusations of coercion serves as her strategy for placing Elsie into the categories she deems necessary for understanding the truth of Elsie's experiences. Yet, Washburn never reveals the "truth" regarding trauma or perceived intelligence, and we are left primarily with

Nancy's perspective in these matters, so, in that way, readers share with Nancy Elsie's refusal to speak directly about her point of view. While a more compassionate perspective might grant Elsie the possibility of sexual agency, Nancy sees sexual subordination and continued assault of "an innocent." It is this perspective that the novel's silence challenges: what will reader's make of Elsie when in a similar situation to Nancy? To what degree it is fair to assign characteristics of trauma we have come to know through narrative clichés of sexual violence is uncertain, especially when the novel presents us with someone whose ideas, perhaps, are so close to our own, and yet whose attitude is also off-putting.

Between the lines of dialogue, Washburn provides a striking moment of introspection on Nancy's behalf. What motivates the heated debate between Nancy and Horst, and her defense of Elsie, is Nancy's "anger at her own complacency in the face of [her husband's infidelities], at her religion for keeping her trapped in a bad marriage, at her own lack of courage to step outside what Catholicism taught" (142). Her fiery condemnation of the history of the church in blaming women is on its surface meant to challenge Horst's authority in regulating Elsie's behavior. On a more personal level, however, it would seem that Nancy's claims to empathize with Elsie have been misguided since Nancy primarily wants to see herself in her child-surrogate, thus displacing Elsie's agency and replacing it with her own. At this point, readers might be alarmed concerning their own routes to identification with Elsie since they have been primarily made available by Nancy's perspective. The self-interestedness of Nancy, even though she has been presented as the character closest to, and even most sympathetic, to the protagonist, calls into question the possibility of identifying with Elsie. Nancy has

demanded a strong, articulate voice from another, yet cannot even speak to her own troubles, or abide by the very silence she fails to tolerate.

While Nancy's contradictory promotion and intolerance of silence casts doubt on her ability to grant readers understanding of Elsie's experience, Oscar serves as another candidate for telling a story about Elsie that offers some chance of understanding. The very beginning of the novel especially cues us in to the significance of Oscar as an appropriate storyteller given that the impersonal voice of the first few paragraphs comes off as authoritative and objective, a feature of the second-person chapters that seems to drop off later. The reader is directly told (at this point we are not yet aware that "you" is a character) to seek out the "grandfathers" for the real story. Washburn need not elaborate on who Oscar is because he comes off as a stock character in the ecology of Native fictive written genres: the wise elder whose voice serves as a vehicle for 'truth.' Washburn invigorates the trope by way of a unique, and often unsettling, framing device for which Oscar plays a central role. He plays interlocutor to "you," a character whose identity remains unclear, although clues left by the end of the novel lead to a likely revelation. In the beginning, the novel alternates between chapters in second and third person, describing the present and past, respectively. As the novel progresses, the distinctions between them begin to break down as readers learn that the "voice" of the third-person sections most likely comes from Oscar himself (with the exception of a few chapters in the middle where it seems Nancy takes over storytelling responsibilities, or, at the very least, shares them with Oscar). It would seem that the third-person sections might merely be Oscar's recitations that are differentiated only by traditional numerical chapter markers. In this case, much of the novel consists of someone speaking.

What adds to the narrative complexity of this technique is that, initially, it is entirely unclear who "you" is, despite the fact that "your" presence presumably serves as the primary reason for telling the story of "Elsie's business" in the first place. By the end of the novel, however, we learn that "you" is Elsie's father, coincidentally named George Washington, a black migrant worker who had had an affair with Mary Roberts and went back home to Mississippi, never knowing until after Elsie's death that he had a daughter. His intention for coming into town is to exhume Elsie's body and take her back home, the motivation of which he later boils down to "common decency." This revelation enables the reader to backtrack and decipher clues earlier in the story having to do with the cold reception to "you." The novel ultimately leaves Sioux communal responses to and histories of blackness under-examined, but we are left with the sense that there probably exists an underlying anti-black racism structuring the personal and bureaucratic responses to George. The backtracking prompted by the revelation might leave us wondering why Elsie's blackness had not played a more significant role, even a mention, perhaps, by Nancy whose attentiveness to markers of victimization lead her to identify Elsie in such a way. A weakness of the novel, I would say, is the intriguing premise of blackness that serves more as a twist in the story than anything else. The silence surrounding the racial politics of communal identification simply do not receive the same attention as other matters of silence. Nevertheless, Oscar cryptically touches on blackness in certain interactions with George I discuss later.

The use of second person serves Washburn's purposes well in terms of the novel's relationship with the genre of mystery. Playing with the conventions, Washburn has decided not to reveal who actually murdered Elsie, but creates tension around the

identity of "you" so that, by the end, she may at least offer some relief to the reader. More than a structural aspect of the story, moreover, the use of second person suggests a sense of self-awareness in relation to the audience that figures significantly in the world of Native literature and as a philosophical treatment of storytelling. Weaver's "communitist" thesis regarding Native literature, particularly having to do with the role of the author, might strike readers as peculiar if we assume that Native authors' intended audience is the community to which the author is held accountable. The use of second person, however, invites the reader into the fictive world of the community, as if inviting a tourist to stay awhile. Indeed, the readers' avatar, "you," or George, is an outsider. Even more than this, the novel's second person voice makes it meta-fictional, not in the sense that it announces itself as a novel, but that it at least calls attention to its own modes of storytelling. The text speaking beyond itself to whoever "you" might be prompts a self-reflective meditation on its representations of sexual violence and what we have perceived to be proper responses to it. The direct appeal to the reader is especially poignant in that it creates an immediacy with which we confront silences regarding Elsie's story, gaps perhaps intolerable to readers who expect resolutions in terms of imperatives to speak or testify to abuses. The second person voice serves as a response to our more finely tuned expectations regarding formulas we have come to readily apply to Native literature.

While the complexity of the framing narrative comes into focus as the story goes along, Oscar's particular mode of storytelling remains both alienating and relevant to communal responses to Elsie's experience, actual and perceived. He refuses to answer "your" questions directly, tells stories that seem to have at best a tangential relationship

to the questions asked, and practically speaks in ellipses. Certain elements of his storytelling technique, however, may be familiar to readers of Native American novels, particularly in the way he often invokes a sense of "tradition," in orature and ceremony, for example. As with novels like Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) the traditional oral elements distinguish themselves from more direct forms of narration by way of italicization and centered type. Additionally, the inclusion of these has directed readers to map out correspondences between the "oral tradition" presented in the novel and the protagonist's journey in the main narrative, suggesting the former as guideposts, so to speak, for the latter. Given that Oscar is fond of invoking tradition in obscurantist ways, in some way suggesting that whatever "lesson" might be drawn from its telling serves as a response to George's questions, the novel prompts the question of what relevance this has to articulating Elsie's story. George's bewilderment, *your* bewilderment, might be worth considering as more than a matter of ignorance or lack of cultural fluency. Further, given Jace Weaver's arguments about the "communitist" elements of Native literature discussed earlier, the novel asks us to consider what role tradition plays in telling a story of a "pro-active" commitment to community. I argue that Washburn satirizes such uses of "tradition" because their correspondences to Elsie's story tend to peter out. This, I argue, is an innovative use of tradition because it suggests that novelists have a responsibility in transforming and challenging tradition, contrary, in some ways, to Weaver's assumption that it should be treated affirmatively.

The element of tradition most significant to Oscar as a vehicle for communicating how to understand Elsie is the Deer Woman, the relevancy of which is established in the opening chapters. The first third-person chapter of the novel describes the assault on

Elsie that sets into motion the rest of the story. During the event, Washburn refers to Elsie as a "deer, wounded and run to earth, not dead yet, but waiting for the final shot" (12). In the next chapter, as "you" wait for Oscar to tell Elsie's story, he instead tells a "different one," the story of the Deer Woman. The story's significance is highlighted by its textual representation: the font is italicized and centered on the page, the way some poetry is printed. The typography here has a history in that ethnographers likes Brian Swann in earlier decades worked on translating oral tradition onto the page, often referencing print forms of poetry as a guide for such textual transmission. In the specific story told in this instance, a hunter has a sexual encounter with a beautiful woman during a hunting trip and discovers, when he wakes up, that the woman is gone. He searches for her, but "*only sees a black-tailed deer standing at the edge / Of a little woods*" (17). He heads back to camp, but his obsession for her grows, "*He thinks about the deer woman all the time/ He goes out looking for her every day, but he does not hunt*" (17). When he goes missing in his obsessive search for the Deer Woman, others look for him and find him dead, "*trampled to death by a deer*" (17). "There's lots of those old deer woman stories," Oscar notes, never directly commenting on his purposes in relating the story (17). Its significance grows more apparent, however, throughout the novel, notably when we learn that a deer causes the deaths of Elsie's assailants. Even more notably, the motif picks up steam in the later chapter, entitled "Elsie's Business," in which Oscar tells "you" that in the months leading up to Elsie's murder, during deer season, "some of the men of the Roberts family and a few others went a little crazy" (161). Little Mack, for example, "scream[s] like a girl" and "hide[s] under his bed" upon seeing a deer carcass (161). Georgie Dubois claims to see a "deer walking down Main Street in broad daylight" (161).

The saliency of the references in this chapter is that they come just before the discovery of Elsie's body, and, further, that the maddening effects of the Deer Woman are not just an element of story, but also of the quotidian reality of the "alternate dimension that was the Indian part of Jackson" (162).

The "crisis brewing" during deer season has different effects on women. For example, Oscar notes that "Mary Crow Bird [would] become the best bead worker of them all because she saw the deer woman … that was the woman gift" (162). From this perspective, the deer woman story is one of female empowerment, resilience, and triumph. (The name is significant here since it is most likely a reference to Mary Crow Dog, Lakota artist and autobiographer, who might be then the only actual person mentioned.) We might also note the deer woman motif seems to be pan-tribal. Writing on similar themes in his reading of Joy Harjo, Craig Womack observes that the deer woman of southeastern Indian contexts lures people, usually hunters, into a deer world (bear world in Cherokee traditions) "where the normal responsibilities of human daily life do not apply" (229). The temptation to enter this world is a strong one because it represents a kind of utopia, a place where all desires are fulfilled, where there is an abundance of pleasure. For men, this might represent some kind of erotic utopia – an endless summer vacation at the Playboy mansion offering up a sexual smorgasbord. In some traditional stories, this is also a place where humans no longer have to be human. Womack explains that in these variations of the stories, the hunter, after he falls asleep, is dressed up by the "deer's kin in deerskin and antlers, and is transformed into a deer himself" and, consequently, the "family's attempts to bring him back to human existence end fatally" (229). Though this transformation does not take place in Oscar's account,

the story does offer elements of the lure of the deer world: the hunter abandons responsibility to his family – "*His family begins to starve*" – and to his own body – "*he doesn't eat. He can't sleep*" (17). In his reading of the poem "Deer Dancer," from *In Mad Love and War*, Womack argues that Harjo "politicizes the … transformation idea and brings out the larger meaning for all tribal peoples by making the lure to other worlds the imagining of life without colonialism" (230). Harjo's ability to "critique oppressive systems" and, simultaneously, to "imagine their absence" through the deer transformation theme is important for Womack because, as he explains, the "process of decolonizing one's mind, a first step before one can achieve a political consciousness and engage oneself in activism, has to begin with imagining some alternative" (230).

Obviously the potential for the triumphalism of the deer woman story in Lakota contexts does not pan out for Washburn's protagonist. Despite her being identified as the embodiment of the deer woman, Elsie is victimized. This becomes a point of anxiety for the Indian community of Jackson in the aftermath of the failure to pin down Elsie's murderer: "They worried about Georgie … whose whereabouts at the time of Elsie's murder couldn't be pinned down … but they didn't really believe that one of their own had killed Elsie" (183). Washburn here makes explicit reference to the saliency of the stories in underscoring their anxieties: folks in the Indian community of Jackson "remembered that in the stories, none of the men afflicted had ever attacked the deer woman herself head on. She was too powerful, but they were afraid it might have been one of their own, that some new story with a far different twist had come into being in Jackson" (183). Also, the Deer Woman story takes a different shape than its presumably "traditional" telling because the Roberts boys fear her, and their terror and madness runs

counter to the idea that attraction initially prompts a response to and from her. The elements of the story have been almost completely reconfigured, yet their combination still holds some amount of familiarity to the audience. That the Deer Woman story cannot hold as a frame of reference for the community, and that this "new story" is troubling to even articulate, is made all the more powerful by way of Washburn's refusal to name the antagonist. It would perhaps be much easier to make judgments about which version is more accurate if we knew this person's identity. This is one way in which a certain silence serves as a device for analyzing the usefulness of what is told.

What to make of these "twists" becomes more than an aesthetic problem in the community. This fear they hold of "some new story" suggests ways in which the insistence on affirmative approaches to orature, for example, as exclusively generative, restorative, and sustaining, makes tradition inflexible and inadequate in describing the realities that communities face. In the case of Elsie, tradition imposes a kind of silence on her experiences since her relation to the community is primarily one of estrangement: "they were a little afraid of her, being as she was, the embodiment of past transgressions, living proof of what happens when people upset the social order of things" (68). The ironies of this are underscored by Elsie's ability to adequately follow "tradition," her learning practices of tanning hides and beading moccasins, for example, or the acknowledged status of the women in her family embodying the deer woman. Washburn's novel itself upsets the "order of things" by telling the very story that might be rejected along the lines of failing to properly fall in line with tradition. This has to do not only with a presumed rigidity when it comes to telling a story the proper way, but also in that the "social order of things" Elsie and her mother seem to defy might very well

reference the community's anti-black racism, especially regarding Elsie's father. To put it bluntly, the "order of things" would insist on a prohibition on miscegenation, making sexual relations with black people and progeny thereof taboo. The issue of blackness resonates unevenly throughout the novel, but it persists as more than just a twist to the story, even if in minimal ways. It seems somewhat important to Oscar when, for example, he tells George the story of how crows became black, and remarks, "You're going to appreciate this one" (93). Whether Washburn makes a strong enough case for considering the racial politics of the Deer Woman story is questionable, but the discomforting features of tragedy she employs, especially exacerbated by the failure to provide closure or a neatly tied up resolution of all the narrative gaps, agitate the reader, denying a neat articulation of what is affirmative about Indian culture.

In the final chapters of *Elsie's Business*, Washburn once more invokes the ironies of tradition by way of representation of the "wiping the tears" ceremony. Many critics of Native novels, especially ones like *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony*, posit a protagonist's participation in ceremony as a restorative necessity in binding the subject back into the community. Ben Benally's recitation of the Blessingway, for example, about two-thirds into Momaday's novel, possibly sets into motion Abel's recovery of an "authentic" identity and voice. Of course, in Washburn's novel, the ceremony is one of mourning, a form of restoration for the community as a whole, and only partly a nod to Elsie. As Oscar explains the ceremony, he mentions that "we should have done it [a month earlier], but you know, people kind of wanted to forget about Elsie. Until you showed up" (195). "You" retort, "I thought she wasn't part of – you know – part of everybody else. The Roberts, I mean. Or any of the rest of you folks" (195). As Oscar

suggests in the opening chapter, “she wasn’t really, but she was everybody’s relative” (195). “Besides,” Oscar responds, “some of the people are kind of thinking that if they do this ceremony, they’re won’t be any more young men seeing the deer woman” (195-6). The sentiments expressed here, including George’s subtle rebuke, may again serve as veiled references to racism regarding African Americans in the community. Regardless, the sentiment here is echoed by others in the community in subsequent chapters: the coroner tells “you” that “this town will be glad to put an end to this whole Elsie business” (204); and Jack Mason makes an appearance to reveal that he has paid the costs for Elsie’s exhumation and relocation because “I want that dead girl and you to hell and gone out of our lives” (209). It would seem Elsie’s presence is more trouble than it’s worth, even in death, and to be rid of her ensures integrity for those haunted by it. This is especially relevant in light of the “communitist” thesis: here we have a novel that builds up to a traditional ceremony meant to purge an individual, the performance of which is an example of a “pro-active commitment to community.”

The final irony of the novel is that Elsie’s dignity, even in death, is subject to those who do not know her, yet have a vested interest in a kind of ownership over her. Her biological father serves as the final actant in her story. George did not know Elsie but “had some idea that common decency mattered” (192). On the final page, George glances back at Elsie’s coffin and pronounces, “We’re going home, daughter” (212). While an appeal is made to “common decency,” it is peculiar that “you” bestow upon yourself the authority to make a particular claim to kinship – a father-daughter relationship strictly based on paternity – that mirrors the absurdity of Oscar’s claim to it. Also, to make the judgment about where Elsie’s “home” is mirrors the extension of

jurisdictional authority made by Sheriff Peterson who would whisk her away from her home in Mobridge, where she took up residence with her mother. Behind all this lies the issue of whether or not the Indian community's rights to Elsie's body, memory, and legacy, are any more salient than George's. This point, however, remains curiously unchallenged and unremarked by anyone who might be in a position to make such judgments. In this way, the community's "pro-active commitment" to one of its own is best described as one of reluctance and silence, only making a claim to Elsie when reminded to do so by the mere presence of her father. The significance of the final act of relocation is that it ensures, most likely, George, as well as "you," as the final arbiter of Elsie's story, a continuation of the passing of the baton from the official reports, Oscar, Nancy, and anyone else who had an interest in digging into Elsie's business.

The continuous deferral of narrative responsibility that serves as a structuring feature of the novel prompts the question of what responsibility Washburn has toward Elsie's story. It would seem that the maintenance of a tension between silence and articulation suggests the novelist's responsibility to refuse accessibility to a fully-formed, knowable subject. This might be especially pertinent in representations of sexual violence, or other forms of victimization and suffering, that would risk promoting understanding at any cost, including making culture and identity readily-available objects for easy consumption. What is interesting about the novel is that its protagonist lacks depth, and this need not be constructed as a judgment of quality. It would seem to be innovative within contexts that have constructed identification, testimony, and communal sustainability as necessary premises for the powers of literature, especially in that they expect positive outcomes. *Elsie's Business*, makes the case, I think, that there is value in

tolerating silences that exist at the edges of the known and unknown, of the comfortable and uncomfortable. Reading the novel for its many effects of silence and articulation helps frame the questions of why we want or feel the need to cross these boundaries.

Of the many effects of silence, we might isolate one that appears to offer some nuance to the "communitist thesis" of Native literature, and which can be found operating in *Elsie's Business* and *House Made of Dawn*. Contrary to the motivation for asserting such communal theses about Native literature, we can argue that one aspect of a "pro-active commitment to community" entails the purging of an individual's distinctiveness. When applied to studies of protagonists, the question, then, becomes: to what degree and in what way do protagonists conform to and resist the demands of communal identification? In Momaday's novel, we find certain aspects of language operating as criteria for Abel's inclusion. Tosamah's meditation on "the Word" serving as a means of delineating Indian and non-Indian theories of language, and Ben Benally's recitation of the Blessingway as a means to heal Abel. In the end of *House Made of Dawn*, Abel remains silent: "there was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song" (185). Abel's silence in the end has the effect of putting into question the usefulness of language criteria expressed elsewhere in the novel. He "recites" the Blessingway, in a sense recognizing the value of tradition, but does so in characteristically muted fashion. His relationship to tradition remains ambivalent. In *Elsie's Business*, Oscar's speaking in ellipses and invoking traditional stories attempt to frame Elsie as part and parcel of his communal framework, yet Elsie seems to resist such formulations. She is related to but unlike the Deer Woman of Oscar's telling. Also, Oscar's appeal to kinship, a significant aspect of his cultural instruction to George, fails

to hold up as a means to describe Elsie's relationship to the community. Her heritage, from both her mother and father, mark her as an outsider. In both novels, we encounter characters we recognize as "traditional" who attempt to invoke tradition as a means of binding the "alienated" protagonists to the community. Both Elsie and Abel never make firm commitments to community values. They remain distinctively silent and inarticulate to the end.

Considering the challenging points of view presented in *Elsie's Business* in relation to silence and communal identification also brings up a rather unsettling point of comparison to *House Made of Dawn*, especially considering the role of ceremony and tradition in the novels. While fruitful to compare Abel and Elsie with respect to their unique voices and resistance to tradition, and the mere fact that they are both central characters, it is startling to consider that a suitable analogue for Elsie is Juan Reyes Fragua, the elder Jemez man with albinism. Critics of the novel construct Juan as an outsider, yet his participation in ceremony, the rooster pull at the Feast of Santiago, would suggest otherwise. His albinism, however, becomes a sticking point. Critics cannot see it as anything but as symbolic of whiteness, and therefore antagonism. To be sure, Juan does antagonize Abel, but he does so out of a sense of the conventions of the rooster pull itself. What is most striking about criticism of the novel, I think, is that while debate centers on the morality and motivation for Abel's killing of Juan, mention is not made of the fact that no one in the community (except for Ben Benally) seems to remember that Juan existed in the first place. Even considering Benally's point of view along with other references made to Juan, prior to his death, there does not seem to be something resembling a communal framework for considering the justice and ethics of

Abel's actions. The U.S. legal system seems to be the sole arbiter of this. The novel is silent on Juan's exclusion. Washburn's novel centers a character like Juan, a character who has been alienated by way of difference, and one whose death is made to be a painful memory excised from the community by means of the "wiping the tears" ceremony. In this sense, the novel explores the question of what it means for tradition to serve an exclusionary function.

Attending to the complexities of silence and articulation in both novels offers ways of thinking about the limitations of tradition and culture in creating a meaningful framework for understanding. When novelists like Washburn and Momaday present readers with tropes of authenticity, they may do so as more than a means of accurately representing community and culture. They offer these up for critique, for the reader to consider how these elements of tradition, conventionally perceived, affect the protagonists and for what purposes.

Chal Chokes the Prairie Chicken

> "Always he would remember the silence, and though he grew more loquacious as he learned to say meaningless things, he had a reverence for it as long as he lived." – John Joseph Mathews, *Sundown* (13)

In the previous chapters, I have suggested how certain silences and forms of muted articulation complicate typical approaches to conventions of character development and narrative closure, especially in regard to communal theses in Native literary studies. In this chapter, I attend to the peculiar silences constitutive of expressions of sexual desires and orientations on behalf of yet another Native protagonist who's just plain strange, whose sense of articulation, behavior, and attitude offer no clear relationship to what we have considered "traditional": Chal Windzer of John Joseph Mathews' *Sundown* (1934). When it comes to sexuality, at least one critic has ascribed Chal Windzer's behaviors of frustration to a repression of non-normative sexual desires and, indeed, the evidence for Chal's attachment to homoeroticism is strong, particularly in relation to Mathews' endowing Chal with anxiety having to do with strategies he employs for prohibiting disclosure of his being "queer," a term appearing frequently throughout the novel. Attempting to offer some nuance to this silence surrounding queerness, I emphasize the novel's masturbatory potential by attending to the novel's *form* and to *absence* - its inability or refusal to make sex explicit. (No sex takes place except in the case of equine copulation and, in that instance, Chal only watches, he does not participate.) It is in the implicit representation of sex that I link masturbation to silence.

To the first point, the novel provides a rather extensive sequence of events but never seems to get to closure or resolution, at least not convincingly so. It is a novel

whose lack of familiar narrative patterns prompts consideration of what exactly novels can articulate through form. My reading of *Sundown* argues that its rhythms of failure (in not offering closure or resolution) hold some strange relation to the practice of masturbatory edging and its rhythms of failure (in denying orgasm). I'm deliberately forwarding claims having to do with imitative form because (phallic) masturbation itself is often considered a fallacy of imitative form – it's a poor substitute for the "real thing." To the second point, while the absence of direct references to sex allows critics to claim Chal's being "queer" as evidence of same-sex desire, I argue that Chal's active desire for solitude and his fascination with language (the excitement from which sometimes prompts verbal "ejaculations") relate strongly to autoerotic desires and even agency that confound communal expectations Chal finds himself facing in the midst of the transformation of Osage existence in the early twentieth century. The protagonist's experiences of isolation, as we have seen previously, disrupts theses of community and acculturation typically attributed to Native novels. In this resistance to community, silence becomes an important form of challenging group participation and hegemony.

The place of masturbation in literary studies is impossible to sketch out in brief in this chapter, but it is worth holding out the idea that its relevancy is itself difficult to articulate given its peculiar place in the ecology of sex. In some sense, we might imagine it as a nonhegemonic sexual norm, a practice so wide-spread, perhaps even universal, that it need not even be named. We accept without hesitation the silence surrounding its practice in the realm of everyday (and for some of us, every day) experience. In her approach to the topic, Eve Sedgwick has suggested that "modern views of masturbation tend to place it firmly in the framework of optimistic, hygienic narratives of all-too-

normative individual development" (109). In this "modern trivializing" discourse, as Sedgwick has it, "autoeroticism not only is funny – any sexuality of any power is likely to hover near the threshold of hilarity – but must be relegated to the inarticulable space of (a barely superseded) infantility" (110). (And it is worth noting here the Latin etymology of *infant*, meaning to be unable to speak.) Even more, I would venture to say that masturbation influences a relatively small set of genres of speaking, if any, that otherwise flourish under sexualities of sociality: the coming out narrative, deflowering, testimonies of sexual violence, flirting and related forms of erotic bravado and belligerence, and so on. When it comes to speaking, masturbation is most influential, it would seem, when it comes to genres of humor (and to non-verbal forms of communication including the stroking hand gesture that serve a humorous, if derogatory, function). This is all to say that masturbation is a sexuality that provokes its own silences and muted forms of articulation, but when expressed does so best in terms of hilarity.

Autoeroticism seems to become more legible and all the more powerful in the figurative realm, particularly on the level of writing, and literary theory has provided this sense of its influence, on the one hand, along the lines of the "pleasures of the text," the *jouissance* of reading and writing advocated for by Roland Barthes and others. The more familiar figurative usage in literary studies, on the other hand, involves its pejorative function, compacted most intensely in the "literal-minded and censorious metaphor that labels any criticism one doesn't like, or doesn't understand, with the would-be damning epithet 'mental masturbation'" (Sedgwick 110). The sense of articulating autoeroticism as "damning" may very well have been much more pronounced in the "cultural wars" context Sedgwick and others are writing from, but these "recurring indictments of self-

reflexive art and critical theory themselves as forms of mental masturbation" (111) still seem to hold power in denigrating certain approaches to criticism as non-productive and non-communicative. For some of us, the accusation might be peculiar in that it is in some way a denial of or refusal to understand the "highly relational but, in practical terms, solitary pleasure and adventure of writing itself" (110), or, as Lauren Berlant puts it, the "unacknowledged form of private pleasure scholarship can be" (127). While Sedgwick thinks through the epithet of "mental masturbation" as a kind of erotic denial, Berlant parses the pejorative in terms of its accusers imagining themselves in a "disenfranchised audience": "…they argue that criticism has lost its communicative function; they mean *with them*. And if you are not communicating with them, you are masturbating. Traditional criticism is in this sense as alloerotic as the most boring heterosexuality" (127). Whatever pleasure might be experienced by the practitioner comes at the expense of an audience, at least an interested one.

The context for Sedgwick's discussion of masturbation as intellectual erotics can reductively be described in terms of antagonisms between the old "Great Books, Great Men" critics of literature and the multicultural, radically inclusive critics and theorists. To attend to the context *now*, and more specifically, in the world of Native literary studies, the power asymmetries imagined in critical contexts is similar, but the focus is a bit different in that charges of "mental masturbation" come from the lower end, so to speak. The theory-minded folks denigrated as mental masturbators by the great-works-elite now face similar accusations by the post-theory folks. Again, we broach the idea of utilizing masturbatory practice to identify someone whose work is not productive toward the ends we imagine to be necessary for criticism.

Consider, for example, that a search for "masturbatory" in *Studies in American Indian Literatures* yields reviews having to do with non-Native critics employing critical theory to make certain judgments about Native literature. Near the end of his review of Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, Daniel Heath Justice remarks that "the book's function is more insidious, as it works, both directly and indirectly, to rhetorically remove Indians from any place in the critical discussion except as hybrid trail guides and cross-cultural scouts for non-Native homesteaders, or as shape-shifting shadows playing language games that, when stripped of political or social context, are more masturbatory than meaningful" (151). In the last sentence, Justice suggests that the "only place for Native peoples in [Pulitano's] model of 'Native American critical theory' is as ghosts – invisible, voiceless, and willfully forgotten" (152). The key idea here, expressed with much fervor in the whole of Native literary studies, is that language stripped of its communal contexts lacks meaning, and, in its meaninglessness, is somehow connected to autoeroticism. Isolation, it would seem, is non-virtuous and inimical to an Indian ethic despite the possibility that we have all these novels featuring alienated protagonists, not to mention characters who are described at great lengths as "invisible, voiceless, and willfully forgotten." We have here expressed, once again but now eroticized in a peculiar way, the idea that Native literature exhibits some natural connection to what is perceived as Native community. This kind of work seems to be all neatly coherent and does not deal with the potential messiness of affiliations, as if we could dig into the specificity and distinctiveness of Native literature without getting our hands dirty.

Sam McKegney continues this train of thought in his "Open Letter Concerning Non-Native Scholars of Native Literatures." He laments the "intense self-reflexivity … in the age of post-modern literary analysis," wherein "analyses of Native literary productions by non-Natives at times take [self-reflexivity] to a new level in which the actions of the critic become the primary site of inquiry rather than a cautionary apparatus designed to render the primary analysis more *fertile*" (59, emphasis added). "While to a certain extent necessary," McKegney suggests, "the 'Focus Inward' has always seemed to me slightly masturbatory": "It is kind of like the backhanded paternalism of saying, 'you might get hurt in the ring, so please stay on the sidelines while I shadow box myself'" (59-60). It would seem there is a kind of sexual politics at play in terms of delineating what are proper approaches to criticism, yet what might be unusual about these two very brief references is that 1) an alternative erotics is not named and 2) it seems that masturbation is only practiced by non-Natives. Are we to presume, for example, that whatever proper erotics of criticism there might be, they are to be "fertile," as McKegney puts it? Or should erotics be left out altogether given what might be imagined as the inherent power asymmetries between critic and literary subject?

It is perhaps absurd to suggest that instances like these indicate something substantive about the erotics of criticism in Native literary studies, but what might be significant is that these masturbatory references need not be elucidated. On an intuitive level, we know what they mean. Again, we have a certain kind of silence surrounding the practice of autoeroticism because its meaning in the pejorative sense need not be articulated. It would be absurd, moreover, to claim that autoeroticism has been notably absent as a possibility for literary critical approaches to Native fiction. Its absence is not

notable in that it is absent everywhere. It is probably not that difficult to explain why Justice and McKegney make these references. Autoeroticism is pointless – it is a failed sexual enterprise – in that is an exercise that does not or even cannot produce community and other forms of (human) intersubjective experience. As Sedgwick notes, it "escapes both the narrative of reproduction and (when practiced solo) even the creation of any interpersonal trace, it seems to have an affinity with amnesia" (111). Masturbation, it would seem, cannot be parsed along the lines of subject and object, or even offer a grammar that might flatten out, play around with, and twist the distance and difference between subject and object, self and other. Whatever language we might attach to autoeroticism might only be non-communicative. In this sense, it might be presumed that masturbation is not a productive topic for Native literary studies because it fails to produce the communal ethos that has been constructed as necessary for promoting identification and a connection to "authentic" experience and culture.

I suggest that it may be incorrect to conceive of autoeroticism as solely solitary. On the level of imagination, the masturbator may choose to fantasize about another person, real or fictive. The really kinky masturbator might even fantasize about a whole community, the composition of which may contain any combination of persons (real and fictive) and even non-human. Though immaterial, a social aspect of autoeroticism emerges as a possibility. This all may take place within the realm of silence, or, at the very least, in tandem with strange speech acts and sounds that do not cohere to norms of communication.

While there has been no masturbation manifesto in Native non-fiction, and I'm certainly not going to offer an *apologia autoerotica* here, I'm going to suggest that

criticism's denigration of masturbation is at odds with Native fictive approaches to it. The possibilities for hospitality to autoeroticism as something other than pejorative can be unpacked in the rather strange means by which masturbation *generates* community and identity in literature. Admittedly, these references, much like in the criticism, are brief, and by no means exhaustive, but I want to catalog a few of these on my way to suggesting that there might be something complex going on in Mathews' novel in relation to these hypotheses about autoeroticism – as actual and intellectual practice. In the sketch of masturbation's place in Native literature that follows, we will see that it is far more dynamic than criticism might imagine it to be.

In the past decade or so, at least three anthologies have collected together works by Native writers who tackle sexuality from varying perspectives. The collection *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*, edited by Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, includes two back-to-back pieces featuring masturbation to significant degree, one a poem by Alootook Ipellie, and the other an autobiographical essay by Kenny Laughton. Sophie Mayer remarks on this inclusion: "Ipellie's piece directly precedes Laughton's, creating a mutual masturbatory literary experience between 'the Great White Arctic' and the Australian outback of chooks and redback spiders" (17). The idea hinted at here of a relational and social function of autoeroticism – that self-pleasure speaks across boundaries – suggests a community of masturbators not only in the literary realm but also in the wide world wherever indigenous folks might be found. This seems to resonate with one of the peculiar silences surrounding self-pleasure in that the presumably global community of masturbators is larger than any community any other sexuality might organize, yet we do not name it as such. Ipellie's poem makes this kind of claim in a

stanza related to a transformative experience of masturbation, the discovery of "one of humanity's secrets to staying sane" (153). Furthermore, the two pieces speak to a generative function of autoeroticism that perhaps relates to Sedgwick's suggestion that it has been "conclusively subsumed under that normalizing developmental model … according to which it represents a relatively innocuous way station on the road to a 'full,' i.e., alloerotic, adult genitality defined almost exclusively by gender object of choice" (117). Indeed, both pieces feature central male characters whose early experiences with jerking off have to do with their fixation with women in the pages of pornographic magazines. Ipellie makes consistent reference to the "target" of his desires and ejaculations as the "sacred spot … right between their beautiful writhing legs … holding the secret to the survival of the Eskimo race" (153) and "the spot where the Eskimo race continues to flourish this moment in time/ that wonderful spot between the legs of Party Eskimo Girl" (154) and so on. The fate of future ejaculations is less certain but still inflected by gender object of choice, at the end of Laughton's essay, wherein he observes that after his first masturbatory orgasm, he "still wasn't sure about those bald pussies you know" (160). He reflects, "I knew now that my Willie wasn't just for peeing out of so where would I put it if I ever had the good fortune to lay with a woman?" (160). In both cases, the respective authors create a voice that punctures through a perceived silence regarding sex and offer testimony to demonstrate their solo participation.

Despite what may best be perceived as the heteronormative function of both these pieces, that they are describing early experiences with sexuality that lead into its more adult forms, Mayer organizes her discussion of these under the rubric of "sexuality [that] does not fit the dominant mold" (16). It is as if some taboo on sexuality imposed by

colonialism has been broken by the mere fact of speaking out, or, in this case, writing about, masturbation. Mayer argues that the *Without Reservation* anthology "demonstrates that choosing to speak about something as personal as sexuality is *still* a political move" (16). No doubt it is, but the saliency of political action by way of autobiographical reflections of sex gains its strength from the commonplace in Native studies of "community," and this strategy is clear in Mayer's subtitles. She, for example, cites Jace Weaver in one of these, headlining the section within which we find her discussion of Ipellie and Laughton: "Communitism: From Fugitive Poses to 'A Machine Called Luvin'"(14). How masturbation – as actual practice – serves a proactive commitment to community is not clear; nevertheless, autoeroticism is imagined as simply part of the network of other sexualities. Another section of the essay she subtitles "Present Yourself: Coming Out as a Community" (8). There is the assumption here that readers will offer little resistance in connecting a rather politically and socially charged speech-act such as "coming out" with jerking off, a closeted, if you will, kind of sexuality that presumably never needs any expression as identity.

Here two ideas concerning masturbation's role in Native literary criticism arise. The first is to mark as derogatory criticism that does not make commitments to community, and that may mean failing to consider language within its tribally-specific historical, social, and political contexts, or it may mean an investment in high theory that supposedly divorces literature from its social function, or it may mean any number of things clustering around the thought that "this does not speak to us." The second idea is that when criticism turns its attention to sex in literature– in an anthology of Native writers, for example - it manages to bring masturbation back into the fold, so to speak,

and practically celebrate it for its social function, i.e., it unites people along the lines of shared sexual experiences. In order to achieve the latter, however, masturbation is subsumed by proper sex, sex attached to others, or sex that will eventually lead to congress with others, all of which we might identify as the developmental model. In this sense, in its non-pejorative forms, masturbation cannot be practiced alone. It needs to be attached to an erotics defined by relation to others. It needs to be articulated as having social potential, and this idea is most especially pronounced under the aegis of "community." More than this, sex in itself is valued as communally affirmative if it is attached to positive affects presumed to be constitutive of authentic Native culture. Masturbation can find its place around the fire if it has become detached from shame and other negative affects. It needs to be an experience of joy and pride to be legitimate.

I'll turn now to two non-anthologized pieces of fiction by more well-known authors whose popularity stems from both their output and strong senses of humor and irony: Sherman Alexie and Gerald Vizenor. In these we have the opportunity to imagine what kind of organizing force autoeroticism might have within the fictive world and, in addition, to consider how masturbation gets valued when attached to positive experiences. In Alexie's short story "Do Not Go Gentle," the title riffing on Dylan Thomas's poem and its (presumably) unintended sexual echoes, a 15-inch vibrator makes a startling appearance to enact what we have seen elsewhere as the typically expected sense of closure Native literature provides, particularly in resolution that brings healing. The story offers for readers a sense of defamiliarization along the lines of appropriation, as well as a brief nod to Gertrude Stein when the narrator asks, "A vibrator is a vibrator is a vibrator, right?" (101). Stricken with grief over their dying baby, an Indian father

ventures out of the hospital to buy a toy and finds himself, absent-mindedly, at a sex-shop called "Toys in Babeland." Browsing the dildos, edible underwear, butt plugs, and lubricants, the protagonist spots the vibrator "Chocolate Thunder" while "that big old music from that *2001:Space Odyssey"* plays in his mind (100). The vibrator's dramatic presentation seems warranted given its later use in the hospital as a "drumstick to pound [a] hand drum," the intensity of which prompts the protagonist's wife to sing the "most beautiful song anybody ever heard in that place" (100). The narrator continues, "She sang like ten thousand Indian grandmothers rolled into one mother. All the while, Chocolate Thunder sang with her and turned the whole thing into a healing duet" (100). At the end of the story, the narrator tells us that the baby opened his eyes and that "our baby boy was going to live a long and good life" (101). The story's ending offers closure by restoring the baby's health and the familial unit.

While not necessarily exclusively an instrument of masturbation, the vibrator wields influence in the story as an organizing force of identification and sociality. Similar to Mayer's approach to Ipellie and Laughton in *Without Reservation* wherein she makes the observation that these authors write "iconoclastically" in response to "colonial and religious authorities" (and she means Christianity) (16), Alexie's narrator's attitude toward sex suggests the story's gesture of resistance to sexual prohibitions. For example, the narrator notes that though he was "embarrassed" being in the sex-shop, he was "not a prude, so [he] browsed around, not expecting to buy anything but not wanting to run out of the store like a frightened Christian" (99). In moments like these, the typical readers for Alexie's fiction understand that Indians are not Christian, that they are not prudish about sex, thus buying a 15-inch vibrator is just a simple act without need for shame.

What's more impressive about the story is how imagined cultural contexts – to whatever degree singing and pounding a drum suggest Indian culture – attach meaning to an instrument of masturbation, even to the point that it becomes a voice within the text, singing right along with the exemplary Indian woman in a "healing duet." This is almost the inverse of Justice's claim referenced earlier that in its isolationist form masturbation is meaningless. The story presents a rather strange yet compelling way that, in spite of McKegney and Justice's approaches, masturbation might be made available to Native folks. The radical appropriation of self-sex conjures up authentic culture in an unexpected place (the intensive care unit) and an image of "ten thousand Indian grandmothers." While the latter might not be community proper, the story's central gesture of appropriation suggests some form of socialization by means of solo sex.

Alexie's story demonstrates how a certain Indian attitude toward sex demonstrates masturbation's potential for Indian peoples, even the integrity of life and cultural continuity. Gerald Vizenor's approach to it, though not as fully fleshed out, is even more radical in its organizing function. Vizenor might very well be an exemplary writer not only for his interest in high theory but also for the way he luxuriates in his own terminology, and has done so for the past few decades. His criticism is masturbatory to the point that he takes pleasure in his own words, or this is what he can be "accused" of anyways. In his academic novel, *Hotline Healers*, Vizenor's narrator entertains readers with stories of his cousin Almost Browne, a lecturer in Native studies whose ambivalent relationship to both Native studies and high theory fuels the novel's comic edges in terms of plot, tone, characterization, and just about every aspect of narrative Vizenor gets his hands on. The novel reads as a travel narrative, following Almost on his lecture circuit.

We find him at real universities interacting with both real and imagined professors. Early in the novel, the narrator makes note of an anomaly in his travels: "Amherst College in Massachusetts was the only academic institution my cousin was ever forced to leave" and "Almost was almost more outrageous than he had ever been at other universities, and in such a short time" (37). What follows is a story of masturbation's strange potential to arouse and create radical interpersonal relations, if only briefly, and, as the narrator comments, "in this situation the extremes were aroused by nothing more than common masturbation" (37). During a lecture, a "male feminist professor" asks Almost about his "position on animals," and "assum[ing] the professor meant a sexual position," mimics "bear onanism" (37). The narrator tells us that this "wild masturbation scene aroused the audience," but that this was "not the specific reason he was removed from campus" (37). Somehow – and it is not clear how it gets to this point – Almost "teased seventeen students, thirteen men, and four women, to masturbate with a wild animal in mind" (37). More than this, however, he leads the students to masturbate at the "rail in front of the stoical portrait of Calvin Coolidge" (38). This was "the end of his time at Amherst" and later the "college president removed the portrait and painted the chapel a severe white" (38).

This "wild masturbation scene" takes place over the course of only one page of the novel, and its outrageousness is attributable, in part, to Vizenor's perhaps uncommon linkage of quick pacing and escalating absurdity. Despite its brevity, this scene demonstrates how the hilarity of masturbation in its fictive forms can head out in radical, unexpected directions, definitely presented here as something more than "common masturbation," as the narrator puts it. The source of outrageousness stems from the idea

presented earlier that masturbation is valued when it is imagined to be practiced in social contexts. In order to make sense, masturbation can never be alone, it is in need of some form of sociality or mutuality. And Vizenor takes this to extremes. Not only does Almost do the impossible by mimicking "bear onanism" – I'm not sure what that would look like – but advocates for a sexual practice that crosses species. In this sense, masturbation radicalizes sex by providing a community that extends into the non-human animal world – it's something that all of us do. It might make us rethink what we mean by "all my relations." In Alexie's story we saw how representations of self-sex approach violations of certain taboos. The irreverence in Vizenor is heightened by the practice of *group* masturbation in *public*, indeed, sex that violates professional ethics of the relationship between professor and students. Even more, there is something wonderfully playful in an Indian academic organizing a temporary community of non-Natives by way of masturbation in front of the portrait of the President who signed into law Indian Citizenship. While Vizenor has made humorous reference to masturbation elsewhere, the "masturbation papers" episode in his *Interior Landscapes*, for example, his *Hotline Healers* is one of the more provocative representations in Native literature I cover here. It strays far from the "developmental model" expressed elsewhere and, indeed, deviates from anything resembling typical sexuality or familial units.

As a final example, I turn to the visual medium of the comedy sketch by The 1491s, a troupe who regularly produce short pieces on their YouTube channel and website. With the exception of pornographic depictions, masturbation on the screen elicits laughter much like in its written, fictive appearances. The visual iconography of (phallic) masturbation produces humor and pathos through a trinity of signifiers: a bottle

of lotion, a box of tissues, and a man, crying or clearly in a state of frustration. We need not even see any "action" take place, though a shot or two of him despondently stroking himself helps. The scene is most effective having taken place after a crucial moment of rejection. The signifiers slightly adjusted, the 1491's "More Indianer than You" employs an autoerotic tableaux (bottle of lotion, roll of toilet paper, man seated criss-cross-applesauce, angrily jerking off) at the climax, if you will, of a competition between a young "white" man (played by Ryan Red Corn) and a taller, girthier Indian man (played by White Robertson) to see who does Indian bigger and better. The joke, of course, is that white guys do Indian better. Red Corn's character has the bigger bolo tie, blanket, and drum. He aims his bigger bow effortlessly, nailing his target without even looking. He nails several women as well. After rubbing the belly of a woman he has impressively just impregnated in the orgy, the "white guy" looks on at his Indian companion with pride and arrogance. Having no recourse, having no ability to attract mates on such an exceptional or even mundane level, Robertson rubs himself in what appears to be a fit of anger.

The distinction between the competitors in the final sexual sequence is heightened by each other's voyeurism: Red Corn looking at his counterpart in his pride of sexual conquest and implicitly communicating his superiority with a smirk, and Robertson gazing at Red Corn doing the dirty deed with the hope, we might presume, that one day *he'll have what he's having*. In this sense, as with many other approaches to autoeroticism, the absence of others participating in the act marks it as inferior, as inauthentic sex. The "authenticity" of sex here gets attached to authenticity of identity. Indeed, it is immediately after this sexual stage of the competition when Robertson concedes, "I guess you're right. You are one of us. Brother." The satirical edge of the

sketch has to do with the way it represents reproductive virility and sexual attraction as absurd, yet exemplary, traits of indigeneity. At the end of the video, they sniff each other's hands in that familiar masculinized 'digital' display of sexual conquest despite the one being a failure. Group sex is imagined as one end of the spectrum wherein identity is fleshed out by means of multiple partners. Masturbation takes place at the lower end. It is sex that is not as good as sex with others and, based on the frustration and interest in looking, it is envious of other forms of sex. The humor intended in the sketch may have to do with the viewer's identification with what takes place in between the extremes or extraordinary examples of sex with multiple others and sex with one's self: the "ordinary" sex viewers might imagine to be missing from the more outlandish range of possibilities presented in the video. Given the silence between them in the sexual sequence, their comparing notes on each other's sexual capabilities marks the scene as homoerotic as well. Masturbation is valued in this fictive representation because it provides a humorous route between sex and identity.

At this point, it would be tempting to turn to an affirmative model of sex, and declare that criticism cites masturbation as derogatory to the detriment of masturbation's potential for productivity, the latter idea expressed in humorous, complex, and arresting ways in fiction and film. The impulse would be toward a deconstructive approach, one that points its finger at the masturbation detractors, and accuses them of not being masturbatory enough because, despite what they might claim about its futility and isolationism, masturbation is *actually* generative, it produces community, identity, speech, criticism, and whatever else. This idea, in turn, would theorize the importance of autoeroticism not only in the fictive realm but also in the real world. Masturbation has a

sociality to it that literally unites people. The driving force of the dissertation as a whole, however, has been to put affirmation into question as a reasonable model for criticism. In this sense, the approach to masturbation would be one that speaks to the side of a deconstructive approach that directs its energies toward the question of how autoeroticism is productive. A related question that might get left out here, and one that might be important for doing something else, involves considering how *well* it can be productive and to what ends. Why would we want masturbation to produce community? Is there a fruitful way to return to the seemingly default position that finds fault in masturbation's isolationist effects? Should every aspect of Native literature, including sex, make community a baseline requirement? Here I'm attempting to make some parallels to the problem of silence and muted articulation, dimensions of which we have seen are often categorized along the lines of how they generate community and healing. I consider here what happens when masturbation is detached from the positive affects and located in the realms of shame and frustration, primary features of Mathews' novel.

The problem with masturbation, even other forms of sex, is that it receives attention primarily on its level of denotation. We have seen in the previous examples ways in which sex is made explicit in certain stories, novels, poems, and films. Whatever critical energy masturbation might provide comes from these representations that can put it on display. The method cultivated here might not work when turned to sex that cannot speak its name, so to speak. Thus I turn to Mathews' *Sundown*, a novel in which, despite sex not being explicit, is about sex. The structure of the novel itself is kind of a tease: it never convincingly gets to resolution and we have to – Mathews had to – impose some form of finality on the story lest the threat of endless repetition rears its ugly head,

producing the anxiety that comes from wondering if anything better will come along. Indeed, what makes the novel's sex resonate in important ways partly has to do with how the novel's inability to create closure is in some ways tied into the sexual language hovering around the protagonist's closure. And that language is often masturbatory. Near the end, Chal Windzer dances "frantically for some sort of climax; that sense of completeness that consummates the creative urge; an orgasm of the spirit"; "in his despair, he broke the rhythm of his singing and yelled, but still the emotion was choked in his body" (297). This anti-climax really does not have much of a sting to it because the novel as a whole treats us to a series of edges we and Chal always come to, edges that hold out the promise of something transformative if we cross over. This edging – the kind of masturbation that compounds pointlessness on top of pointlessness – is constitutive of the erotic experience of the novel. The novel is formally an exercise in the repetition and amnesia Sedgwick sees as perceived characteristics of masturbation. This and the protagonist's active desire for solitude make it ripe for uncovering the novel's autoerotic potential.

The strangeness of erotics in the novel are worth holding onto given the novel's place in the canon of Native American novels. Louis Owens argues that Mathews "introduced the modern American Indian novel, laying out a pattern for novels by Indian writers that would be confirmed … again and again during succeeding decades" (49). One startling difference, however, might be that since Mathews, especially since Momaday, sex has had the capacity to be named explicitly, and we have seen this in both *House Made of Dawn* and *Elsie's Business*. But another important difference has to do with the kind of protagonist featured in the novel and the techniques for presenting the

subject. *Sundown* tells the story of a protagonist, Chal Windzer, born into an Osage family in the late nineteenth century to a "full-blood" mother and a "mixed-blood" father at the cusp of allotment, Oklahoma statehood, the oil boom, and the Great Depression, whose silences and difficulties with articulation serve as features of his alienation and estrangement from others. Chal is quite different from his counterparts in the novels of Momaday and Washburn. Abel and Elsie are born as outsiders. Abel's father is not Jemez and thus his family is "somehow foreign and strange," as Momaday puts it. Elsie's mother is estranged from the Lakota community and her father is a black migrant worker who does not enter into her "life" until after her death, having not even known about her until then. Chal's parents are both present and both Osage. This is unique even in comparison to Mathews' contemporaries, like Mourning Dove and D'arcy McNickle, whose protagonists are of mixed-race heritage. Furthermore, Chal, at least for the first couple decades of his life or so, holds a relative amount of privilege given the wealth and opportunities brought about by grazing leases and the oil monies generated in the oil boom by way of the tribes' reserved mineral rights. Also unique to *Sundown*, especially in comparison to the novels of Momaday and Washburn, is its method of storytelling in that it follows its protagonist from birth to his early thirties, allowing the opportunity, for my purposes, a reading that traces out the contingencies and effects of silence and articulation in broader strokes unavailable in the more fractured and compressed narratives of the previous novels discussed, not to mention a kind of exploration of sex unavailable elsewhere. This narrative strategy also makes it distinct because it tells the story of how the process of estrangement and alienation, themes in common with other

novels, works across time and, consequently, shares with the contemporary psychological impulse to interpret Native fiction along the lines of development.

What I find unique about Chal is that he possesses a degree of self-consciousness – not, of course, fully realized – from which, at times, he is able to name and announce his own weirdness, or his being "queer," as Mathews frequently refers to it. The agency he exercises in terms of the way he sees himself - though it often leads to frustration, shame, embarrassment, anxiety, and a sense of not belonging – contributes to certain decisions he makes about with whom or what he wishes to be affiliated, even though he does not always act on them. While this may, in part, be the result of his relative privilege, it is a trait that seems unique to the novel in comparison to characters like Abel and Elsie whose authors seem to grant them little awareness and power in terms of how they would like the world to work for them, or, just as importantly, how they see themselves (Abel and Elsie, for example, don't go around cursing themselves for some stupid, embarrassing thing they just did). In this sense, Mathews imbues Chal with an egoism that offers a fuller portrait of the way he thinks about various matters in his community and of himself, an access to the life of the mind withheld from readers in the novels of Momaday and Washburn given their commitments to methods of more indirect storytelling. The distinctiveness of Mathews' protagonist-centered approach is that we experience a character who, at least in his childhood, not only possesses a great degree of self-consciousness but also quite the vivid imagination, a characteristic Chal perceives to wither away throughout his life. These powers of imagination crystallize most powerfully in the early chapters of childhood wherein Chal has the capability of imagining himself as an animal, as someone else, as someone connected in peculiar ways to non-human

objects. His flights of fancy on the plains – his actually imagining himself flying- become literalized in his adult life when he becomes a pilot, one of many ways he attempts to recapture his childhood.

Following from impulses in the previous two chapters, I take into consideration these features of the novel and its criticism in relation to the effects – perceived and real – of Chal's weirdness, particularly his silence, strange articulations and relationship to language, his isolation and ambivalence about estrangement, and his erotic experiences. A key feature of the novel is its relentless representation and acting out of frustration. These experiences of frustration are pronounced most especially when Chal has difficulty in expressing his desires, especially in figuring out where and how he wants to belong in relation to certain communities, and in understanding how he wants to act and behave around others (and to what degree these desires should conform to social expectations). In making the case for the relevancy of frustration – with respect to the topic of silence and articulation – I want to put pressure on critics' tendency to impose a template on *Sundown* that shares much in common with approaches to Native American fiction of later decades. Much of the criticism focuses on the familiar themes of community and identity through an affirmative lens that emphasizes sociality, affiliation, and belonging as positive values, and, as seen especially in the chapter on Momaday, values articulation and silence only when they are in line with what are perceived to be "authentic" traits. Mathews' refusal to purge the negative effects related to Chal's "problems" suggest ways for understanding what it means to be in opposition to these values, or to deviate from them, and, perhaps, how to make what's understood to be "authentic" a question rather than a presumption. Through its weirdness, *Sundown* asserts agency on behalf of a

protagonist who exists outside the typical parameters of tradition and authentic Indian identity.

One of the earliest critical approaches to Mathews' work comes from Louis Owen's *Other Destinies,* a study of Native novels from the late nineteenth-century to the 1980's. The book serves as a kind of general overview for the genre of the Native American novel, an important intervention in the fledgling field of Native literary studies. Owens' third chapter focuses on two male-authored novels, D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936) and *Sundown*. Reminiscent of the criticism in the decade before this study, Owens focuses on authenticity, wholeness, articulation, well-being, a coherent sense of self, and living in two worlds. The difference in his work is that he borrows from postcolonial and postmodern theory, rather than psychologies of development that we saw important for studies of Momaday, often quoting directly from thinkers in the fields to make his arguments about Chal.[1] What is crucial for his arguments about Mathews' work is what he identifies as the "dialectic that will inform the novel's plot: the struggle between old and new – Indian and Euramerican – 'orders'" (52). The assumption is that the novel acts out a battle between values of the colonizers and colonized, and the question, then, becomes how and why do these values win out (or what possibilities are there for synthesis) and what effect do they have on Chal. This serves as a guiding principle for subsequent criticism. Important for his arguments is his strategy of going through Chal's life nearly sequentially, from childhood, to adolescence,

[1] For example, he identifies *Sundown* as a "quintessential postcolonial scenario": "Like others in such a postcolonial drama, including nearly all Native Americans, Mathews' characters are beset by 'a pervasive concern with … identity and authenticity'" (50). Here he quotes from *The Empire Writes Back*, a major study of postcolonial literature at the time. Later he quotes from David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* in discussing Chal's inability to articulate, a line of reasoning I investigate below.

to his university experiences, and finally to his experiences at home in the end of the novel.

Reading the novel in this nearly linear fashion serves as an organizing principle of many critics' interpretations since, for the most part, they concern themselves with pinpointing motivating factors for Chal's decline, and why he turns to self-loathing. Owens argues that it is "Mathews' depiction of Chal Windzer's *descent toward ruin* which challenges 'the disinheritors of his people,' a descent culminating when Chal swears to himself, 'I wish I didn't have a drop of God damn Indian blood in my veins'"(52, emphasis added). It is his decline, and moments of racialized self-hatred, that signal for Owens ways in which the values of the dominant culture have had some effect in eroding his sense of Osage identity. The pattern of decline and dissociation does not, for Owens, necessarily lead to an "end on a fatalistic note" (59). Mathews, he argues, refuses any "romantic closure that would deny the immense difficulties confronting the displaced Native American, but simultaneously reject[s] the cliché of the Vanishing American as epic, tragic hero" (60). This disruption of romantic posturing – "lament for the dying noble savage" – is achieved by way of perspective: "Writing from within the supposedly 'dying' culture rather than from the outside, however, Mathews goes beyond such a stock response, making of Chal's story a more complex narrative of cultural survival" (53). The goal of this method, Owens argues, is an "awakening to a renewed sense of self – authenticity – for Native Americans" (53). This interpretive outlook suggests that the dialectal struggles of the novel do not necessitate reading the story for its winners and losers. What's even more striking about Owen's arguments, I think, is the way that he attempts to point out what is unique about the novel, particularly in that it

features a protagonist whose future is uncertain, and that ambiguity is worth holding onto when engaging with the "dilemmas of Indian existence and identity in the twentieth century" (53). Chal's failure is not necessarily fate.

The conclusions Owens comes to about the possibilities for an "awakening to a renewed sense of self" or "authenticity" unravel a bit when it comes to his approach to the question of identity in relationship to culture and language. He posits contradictory positions about Chal's identity, suggesting that Owens is inconsistent in figuring out how certain "traditional" elements corroborate Chal's identification as authentically Osage. The problem Owens faces, which he never explicates, involves one of the defining features of the novel, an aspect with which other critics struggle: Chal's isolation. "Associations with the natural world – the sacred geography of the Osage people," Owens writes, "will serve as an index to Chal Windzer's character and well-being" (51). Throughout his life, Chal seeks solace in the natural world by way of travels across the prairies, among the blackjacks, and riverside retreats. At the beginning of his essay, Owens argues that "during those moments when, for a brief time, he is immersed in nature, he will feel nearly whole and close to something instinctual and sustaining; when he is removed from intimate contact with the natural world, he will become ever more displaced and confused" (51). Robert Dale Parker, too, announces the silence of these moments as a "haven of security for his Indianness" and argues that his "Osage imaginary depends mainly on moments when he is alone" (28).

At other times in critics' approaches, however, Chal's experiences with nature are inauthentic because he does not possess the ability to articulate the fullness of experience and he is not adequately in touch with community. In terms of the latter, for example,

Parker argues that Chal's Osage imaginary "has [little] to do with *actual Osage culture*" and he's invested in a romanticized sense of "being Osage" (29, emphasis added). "I say 'being Osage,'" Parker writes, "because Chal's Osage imaginary is so lonely, so nonsocial" (29). Owens notes, too, that "Indian identity is communal and Chal has lost his place within the Osage community" (55). The consequence of this isolation, for Owens, is that he does not have a language to articulate a valid sense of self. For example, Owens discusses a passage from early in the novel wherein Chal goes on one of his trips to the creek, alone, and wishes to speak aloud all the beautiful words in Osage and English he can remember, apparently in emulation of the coyotes. Chal fails, however, in relieving that "choking feeling." Owens takes this as an instance of Chal's failure to "put the parts of himself together in an identity that can comprehend both worlds": "Could Chal conflate the 'beautiful' in both discourses, he might solve the painful dilemma of his inauthenticity and achieve a 'temporal unification of the past and future with the present' that leads to a coherent sense of self […] But Chal's dissociated sensibility cannot speak in one voice; he is choked into silence by his inability to articulate – to put the pieces of the self together into a coherent utterance" (54).

Chal's desire, and subsequent failure, to talk to the moon resembles the problems of articulation Abel experiences in *House Made of Dawn*. And much like the criticism on the latter, Owens has decided that Chal's being "choked into silence" is indicative of pathological deviation from the achievement of an authentic identity that is just out of reach because he does not draw from communal resources of language. Near the end of the analysis, Owens turns to the penultimate chapter of the novel, the scene of Chal's drunken dance, in order to make an argument about communal estrangement and

inauthenticity. This scene, which I discuss more fully later, describes Chal drunkenly dancing alone, "danc[ing] for some sort of climax; that sense of completeness that consummates the creative urge; an orgasm of the spirit" (297). Even more than this, Chal "wanted by some action or some expression, to express the whole meaning of life" (297). Quite the task, I'd say. Owens argues that this is a "frenzied celebration of nothingness rather than a ceremonial act expressive of one's place within the tribal community and natural world. In its frenzy, his dance contradicts the tradition poise and dignity of Osage dances" (58). When it comes to the issue of "express[ing] the whole meaning of life," Owens outrageously writes that "drunk and without the teachings of his people, Chal has no language for such expression. He is inarticulate" (59).

As with other critics, Owens oftentimes sees Chal's solitary acts as exercises in frustration because he assumes that without the values and language that community provides, he cannot be authentic. But authenticity is so absurd in Owen's estimation that it is no wonder Chal fails to achieve it. The "whole meaning of life," apparently, is accessible via the correct alignment of identity, community, and language practices. This kind of argument seems to deny Chal's agency in creating his own imaginary, or perhaps it is better to say reality, wherein frustration, inarticulation, and silence are recognized and practiced as necessary experiences. These cannot be avoided. What's missed out on in approaches like Owens's is a consideration of the value of withdrawal and isolation, or in seeing how these solitary acts are, in some sense, acts of defiance, acts that resist conformity with a community imagined to be in unity (or even under the delusion that complete understanding is accessible through language). Though Chal's solitary acts are often described in terms of frustration, the failure to find relief, they might also suggest

innovation in that they help Chal to find his place in the world, even if that place is distant from community, and even if utterances are noncommunicative. There might also be the sense that Chal's frustrations with articulation have not to do with the fact that he cannot articulate, but that he's irked by the imperative to do so. Many critics seem to construct articulation as an end goal concomitant with authenticity. In this way, little attention is given to the question of why articulation and authenticity are even necessary in constructing an Indian ethic. *Sundown* provides ways for thinking about what cannot be expressed and what might be valuable about deviance from the expected norms.

While Owens' take on the novel is somewhat reminiscent of the criticism we have seen in approaches to "alienated protagonists" elsewhere, Robert Dale Parker and Michael Snyder have offered perspectives on *Sundown* that focus attention on the peculiarities of Chal's sexuality in relation to his frustrations and presumed estrangement. In fashioning their approaches to the issue of sexuality, both Parker and Snyder suggest their allegiances to what they identify as the contemporary critical usage of "queerness." Parker, for example, explains that in "today's lingo the term queer can carry a resistance to the confining binary of homosexual versus heterosexual" and, thus, he argues that "Chal fits into a similar pattern of resistance to dominant sexual categories" (36). While Snyder is more attentive to the uses of the term queer in the early twentieth century, he also appeals to the "contemporary critical sense of queer … connot[ing] a resistance to stable definitions and stable categories of sexual identity, which [he] sees as applicable to Chal Windzer" (29).

Moreover, in making a case for Chal's queerness, both critics labor on the idea that Chal is *not really* attracted to women: Chal's sexuality is "sometimes superficially

directed toward women" (Snyder 30) and he "sometimes goes through the motions of obligatory heterosexuality" (Parker 36). A crucial step in drawing attention to the novel's queer aspects involves analyzing the catalogue of potential women partners for Chal, and showing how he is inactive in pursuing them. Both critics, in fact, describe Chal's relationship with women suitors in terms of distance: Chal "watches and admires from afar, idealizing the relationship" (Snyder 41); he "daydreams about [a woman], but only from an abstracting distance; he never pursues her" (Parker 36). Snyder devotes around three pages to this issue, discussing Chal's relationships with Blo Daubeney, a young sorority woman (41-2), Marie Fobus, Little Flower, and other women back home in Kihekah, Oklahoma, all of which he treats with scorn and disdain (42-43), and Lou Kerry, a woman with whom he has an affair during his time as a pilot (43-4). For the most part, these examples, particularly in regards to Blo and Lou, are for Snyder evidence of the homosocial triangulation between two men and a third-party woman, an object of superficially directed romantic intentions utilized to exercise frustrations having to do with male same-sex desire. Chal's queerness can be uncovered by way of dislodging his attractions to women, assuming that the remaining possibility is a desire covertly channeled toward men (Parker does this on 36-38, and Snyder does this at significant length, 44-49, with significant attention to Professor Granville, one of Chal's male mentors, 46-49).

Both critics express interest in the novel's silences regarding sexuality and expressions of desire. In his chapter on Mathews in *The Invention of Native American Literature* (2003), Robert Dale Parker is the first critic to address the question of sexuality in *Sundown*. Parker situates the novel within historical and cultural critical

contexts that have neglected to consider that "Native Americans have their own history of exchange with the racialized work ethic of the industrial economy, an exchange that continues to construct ideas of race long after the heyday of industrialization" (21). He suggests that the national economy of the early twentieth-century, particularly the era of the great depression preceding Mathews' novel, "constructed Native American ideas of race, work, and gender" (21). He remarks, "With mass joblessness pressuring ideologies that link masculinity to market-valued, public employment, the depression reshaped Native cultural dilemmas and economic suffering in wider and international terms, inviting radical critiques of work-contingent notions of masculinity and of market-contingent notions of the value of work" (21). Given this context, Parker reads the novels of Mathews and McNickle as "rethink[ing] the conflation of work, masculinity, and the market," "encourag[ing] a suspicion of the systematicity that threatened to collapse work, masculinity, and market value into a machine of colonization and assimilation, with – for Mathews and McNickle's purposes – local Indian culture as its target" (20-1). Situating the novels in this way allows Parker to attend to what he sees as the distinctiveness of the protagonists: "Young Indian men in *Sundown* and *The Surrounded* think they have nothing to do, but their sense of *nothing* and of *doing* gradually emerges as a sediment of non-Indian, colonizing ideologies and – especially in *Sundown* – as an invitation to critique those ideologies" (20).

While Parker mainly interprets Chal's gender identifications within a novel he sees as a battleground of particular values having to do with work, and in this sense he shares in common Owens' approach to the novel, he offers some commentary on Chal's sexuality, suggesting on the one hand that "Chal's relation to sexuality isn't simply

natural and unanxious, as he supposes. He usually isn't interested in sexuality, although he sometimes goes through the motions of obligatory heterosexuality" (36). On the other hand, Parker identifies a pattern wherein Chal "feels an attraction to another man, an attraction not simply erotic or unerotic, and then reacts against this attraction … and punish[es] himself for forbidden desire, a punishment that Chal displaces onto the objects of desire, as if those objects were to blame for the desires that he resists" (38). Parker then argues that this "pattern of attraction and defensive revulsion ties together a cluster of homophobic anxieties that reinforce and overdetermine each other: anxieties about affection for men or about masculine company and about heterosexuals' fear of being associated with gays or queerness or being gay or queer, together with anxieties about the cultural pressures to conflate the feminine with the colonized and to cast doubt on colonized, native masculinity" (38).

Broaching the topic of sexuality, even while Parker primarily attends to questions of masculinity, attempts to respond to two questions we have seen, in part, addressed elsewhere: How might Chal's behaviors of frustration be explained? What erotics are available in the novel? The intentions of Parker are larger than the novel itself, however, as he goes on to suggest that "Native American cultural criticism has not usually attended to gender as much as I am trying to do in this book" (38). Michael Snyder's essay on the novel is similarly motivated in that he claims that the "absence of discourse on Chal's sexuality indicates a problematic silence and taboo surrounding same-sex desire within the community [of Native studies]" (28). In making a direct reference to Parker's work, Snyder echoes the sentiment in the essay's conclusion: "The fact that it wasn't until the early years of this current century that same-sex desire was remarked upon in the novel

reveals the virtual silence in Native American literary studies surrounding this issue" (50). Given the trajectory of the essay, beginning and ending with this "problematic" and "virtual" silence, the question of sexuality, answered in terms of "same-sex desire," weighs more heavily in his approach than Parker's. Snyder has decided that the inability of both the novel and its protagonist to articulate sexual desire is best addressed by attending to what he identifies as the novel's "undercurrent of homoeroticism and male attraction" which he attributes to Chal's sexuality, which, "while sometimes superficially directed toward women, points to deep but unspoken relationships with, and attractions, to men" (30). The homophobic anxieties first announced by Parker become for Snyder important in understanding where Chal's frustrations come from. Snyder remarks on the significance of the dimension of queerness in the novel: "Chal's struggle with sexual identity, his repression of desire for other males in the face of social proscriptions of queerness, should be added as another layer of complexity to existing criticisms of *Sundown*, such as Louis Owens's important exegesis in *Other Destinies* that deals with Chal's frustrations as attributable to issues of cultural identity" (39).

Snyder's method for making clear the "undercurrent of homoeroticism" involves his attention to the vocabulary of the novel, as well as certain key scenes inflected by gendered interactions and Chal's responses to them. On his way to making sense of Chal Windzer's sexuality, Snyder employs a diachronic approach to Mathews' lexicon that examines how certain key terms already had a (homo)sexual connotation at the time of the novel's publication in 1934, thus indicating, potentially, the author's purposeful use of words like "queer," "fascinate," and "chicken hawk," among others. Moreover, Snyder notes that the term queer "holds a double valence, often connoting Chal Windzer's same-

sex desire along with his feelings of peculiarity" (29). In this sense, Snyder's approach to sexuality and its potential homoeroticism has to do with how the novel situates its protagonist in various social contexts, moments in which his interactions with others highlights his "peculiarity." As mentioned previously, Chal's supposed superficial interest in women, along with the complexity of his interactions with men, points to this undercurrent of homoeroticism. One possible underlying assumption to both Parker and Snyder is that the distinctiveness of the sexuality in the novel is best expressed in terms of its sociality. When with other people, Chal's actions present something of his (attitude toward) sexuality. When alone, he expresses nothing but frustration regarding his supposed non-normative desires.

In bolstering the case for Chal's repression of sexual desires, Snyder argues that Mathews' narrative commentary, stemming from his method of third-person, limited-omniscient narration, suggests an Osage cultural ethos having to do with sexuality, and this comes to the fore in the sense that the novel, as has been suggested by others, serves as a battleground of cultural values. Snyder pays attention to what is perhaps the only time in the novel where sex is explicit: a scene of two horses mating while groups of white and Indian boys look on. Fascinated by their bodies, Chal watches as the white boys gather to watch horses "consummate an amorous flirtation," and he perceives them "look[ing] around at the undergrowth as though expecting someone to come and catch them in some crime" (Mathews 37). Two of the boys shout, hug each other, and "dance in circles" (37). Mathews tells us that Chal is mystified by their reaction, and that the "impression of that day was deep and he remembered the incident the rest of his life; that impression of the white man making so much over the very unimportant matter of the

possibility of another horse coming into the world" (37). In interpreting this scene, Snyder claims that Chal, even Mathews, has a perspective on sex that would make a stronger case for same-sex desire: "For Chal, sex is just a part of life, and there is no need to blush, giggle, and whisper about such phenomena" and that the horses' copulating is for Chal "the natural and obvious conclusion; where there is mutual desire, this leads to physical love" (35,36). The white boys' behavior, "typical of white American culture's hang-ups, sexual guilt, and shame, is absurd" and, instead, Snyder remarks, "Chal associates both free desire and aestheticism with his Osage tribal heritage" (36). Here we have the familiar idea that desire would have authentic expression if unencumbered by an opposing, colonizing non-Indian point of view.

It would seem, however, that Chal's perspective on sex is far from liberatory, or necessarily promising for a queer-affirmative reading. Snyder's parsing of Chal's "naturalist" arguments regarding an attitude toward sex suggest that sexuality is ideally extricated from experiences of shame or embarrassment. It would seem that a dynamic experience of sex – with all its presumably negative features – would be incompatible with an authentic Indian perspective. Why might blushing, giggling, whispering, and other behaviors of shame not be a part of the experience? What about these features make them non-Indian or somehow inimical to sex? It might also be worth noting that the "natural and obvious conclusion" Snyder posits is not exactly what motivates Chal's commentary in this scenario. For Chal, "physical love" is not an endpoint of mutual desire. It is the "possibility of another horse coming into the world" – that is, the procreative goal of sex – that marks the act as presumably something not to be ashamed of. When Chal makes remarks like these, he often does so in a sophomoric manner,

offering a perspective that seems disinterested and at a distance from the subject matter. For example, later in the novel, Mathews restates the "naturalist" argument in the context of Chal's time among his fraternity brothers at the University of Oklahoma. The "secretiveness," a term he uses in the horse-mating scene, "behind some of the allusions and stories concerning women he could not understand" (139). Mathews tells us that Chal "had never been able to see anything strange or unusual about mating. He had seen it all of his life among the hills, and to him it was a part of nature; a part of the scheme of things which he had always thought was beautiful … everyone he ever knew had accepted them as such; as a part of the nature of things" (139). These thoughts have an objective and academic flair to them and, given this perspective, might be considered a bit odd since the observer does not seem to imagine himself as a participant. It is, indeed, strange and unusual that a person theorizing sex in terms of it being part of the natural world remains silent about how he himself is a part of the "nature of things." It seems a bit of stretch to make a connection between Chal's own thoughts on these matters and an "Osage tribal heritage." Nevertheless, it is these peculiarities of Chal's perspective that help underscore the homoerotic reading, even if they do not quite add up to the kinds of culturally affirmative discourse that Snyder seems to want them to be. In removing himself from these things Chal (at least in his own mind) claims to be universal, it may be reasonable to assume some level of denial or repression.[2]

[2] This pattern of announcing both seeming disinterest and "naturalist" arguments about sex is repeated in Mathews' autobiography *Twenty Thousand Mornings*. He notes here that his philosophy of sex is "from, and of the earth" and that there are "primary laws that govern all life" (95). What is most interesting regarding sex in this book is his bemoaning the "vociferous rediscovery of sex" in the 1960's context from which he's writing. Much like he does in *Sundown*, Mathews in his memoir seems to offer a perspective that disavows the politics of sex. He situates his discussion of sex alongside the "long ago forgotten Victorian taboos" of previous generations (95). See esp. pp 90-96.

When it comes to the question of what erotics are available in *Sundown*, I cannot help but imagine critics' arguments as a response to a question posed by Eve Sedgwick in her essay on "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," a choice upon which she immediately casts suspicion by simply answering "no doubt it must said to be both": "Is this a hetero- or homoerotic novel?" (Tendencies 114). Without precluding the possibility of "male same-sex desire," nor leaving out Chal's peculiar attractions to women, I suggest that Mathews' novel employs queerness as an erotic performance outside of the homo- and hetero- binary. Even as sex is not named, except in the case of equine copulation, the novel makes room for potential expressions of sex in moments of isolation and awkward sociality, imbued even as they are with a strong sense of shame and frustration.

Regarding masturbation, I want to present the idea that it holds a peculiar function as a floating signifier of sex that tends to attach itself - or gets attached to - more familiar, social forms of sex. When it comes to literature in which sex is not explicit, masturbation is altogether ignored as a possibility. In the absence of sex, only absence itself is named as a possibility. This is a result of tendencies to theorize sex almost exclusively along the lines of sociality. In criticism on *Sundown*, we have a case in which energies directed toward teasing out the possible erotics of the novel are directed toward evidence of homoeroticism. In these cases, attention is paid to the novel's sense of frustration, and how we might understand repression of non-normative desires as behavior of this frustration. In this sense, autoeroticism is overshadowed by an erotics of gendered object of choice. Snyder, for example, argues that emphasizing the "undercurrent of homoeroticism" explains why "Chal is so unable to articulate his frustrations, the pent-up

emotions he cannot name, and the *seemingly strange, erotic means by which he attempts to purge them*" (39, emphasis added). "In these attempts to purge these frustrating desires that he cannot articulate," Snyder continues, "Chal repeatedly gets naked and exerts his body to frenzy, trying to reach a climax, but he continually fails to be able to confront or name his sexuality to give relief to his troubling feelings about his sexual identity" (39). For Snyder, it is Chal's "repressed queerness" that helps to explains why this "struggle would be consistently manifested in nakedness and corporeal frenzy," the kinds of "frustrations and urges" that, according to him, "would normally be written off as normal adolescent angst about emerging sexual feelings toward the fairer sex" (40). Here we have an example of the curious absence of masturbation as what might very well be the obvious interpretive frame for understanding these moments of isolation and "corporeal frenzy." Snyder himself circles around it but cannot name the erotics of such moments. He employs ambiguous language to describe these erotic scenes, offering a hint of autoeroticism, but not saying anything specific about masturbation. This is a rare moment in the novel when "sex" takes place in the open instead of behind closed doors. Mathews does not name masturbation either, but it seems peculiar that in an approach committed to disrupting silences having to do with erotic agency, Snyder sees only "repressed queerness" as opposed to uncovering some sense of erotic performance, in seeing erotics as it might actually be taking place, even if it does not offer relief from frustrations or shame. This has to do, perhaps, with tying in sexuality to *identity*, and failing to see that certain *acts* have an agency of their own. At the level of sexual connotation, desire directed toward a gendered object of choice is what is worth articulating.

Reaching outside the world of Native literature for a bit, consider the case of D.A. Miller's sense of connotation in "Anal *Rope*," a study of homoeroticism in Hitchcock's film. Taking as his beginning point the over-emphasis on technical details and the peculiar descriptions of the film (by Truffaut and others) as featuring "two young homosexuals," Miller observes that the "homosexuality of the protagonists, never either visually displayed (with a kiss) or verbally disclosed (by a declaration), is simply not in the story at all," thus, the "heavy silence surrounding homosexuality requires explanation no less than the featherweight fussing over technique" (116,117). Despite this lack of empirical evidence, proscribed as it would be by the 'hard-ass Production Code," Miller argues that "one surely could furnish a wide-ranging abundance of evidence for homosexual meaning in *Rope*, … all that any of it would ascertain is how completely *Rope*'s representation of homosexuality has been consigned to connotation" (118). Miller suggests that the film "exploits the particular aptitude of connotation for allowing homosexual meaning to be elided even as it is also being elaborated" (118). In addition to his obvious interest in the visual discourse of homoeroticism and its psychoanalytic resonance, Miller's task in this essay is motivated by figuring out how connotation works.

What's interesting about his descriptions is the way he ascribes urgency and agency to connotation: "needing corroboration, finding it only in what exhibits the same need, with no better affordance for meeting it, connotation thus tends to light everywhere, to put all signifiers to a test of their hospitality … it will exploit the remotest contacts, enter into the most shameless liaisons, betray all canons of integrity" (120). In terms of *Rope*, Miller argues that if a "case for the homosexuality of Brandon and Philip were ever

actually made, therefore, we should find homosexual meaning inevitably tending, via connotation's limitless mobility, to recruit every signifier of the text" (120). At this point in the essay, Miller begins to delineate the verbal and visual features of the film that would "articulat[e] a viewer's desire for explication of gay material" (123). He devotes the latter half of the argument to these visual elements – those he finds more compelling especially in relation to his Freudian-inflected psychoanalytic approach to the film's anality. It is in his discussion of the verbal features of the film that masturbation makes a brief appearance. Miller cites Brandon telling his guests of a "Sunday morning in the country when 'across the valley the church-bells were ringing and in the yard Philip was doing likewise to the necks of two or three chickens'" (123). It is this innuendo - this punning that "alerts us to the more resonant twist on choking the chicken, old adolescent slang for masturbation" (123-4) – that serves as connotation which "excites the desire for proof, a desire that, so long as it develops within the connotative register, tends to draft every signifier into what nonetheless remains a hopeless task" (123). The assumption left unchecked with regard to sexuality here has to do with the easiness with which Miller imagines his readers to "recruit" masturbation as a signifier of male same-sex desire. Masturbation cannot stand alone, it must have an orientation directed toward gendered object of choice.

In the dream that connotation would "quit its dusky existence for fluorescent literality, would become denotation," as Miller puts it, the signifiers' recruitment demands homogeneity and exclusion (123). When it comes to theorizing masturbation's place in literary studies, especially in texts that might include certain silences or absences as the result of prohibitive codes, I'm suggesting that the floating signifiers of sexuality

attached to gendered objects of choice make themselves more readily available for the "dream" of denotation and thus overshadow autoeroticism's potential for visibility, or even possibility. Masturbation floats along with same-sex desire – they're kin when it comes to connotation – it's just that homoeroticism excites desire for proof more so than its little cousin. In the case of *Sundown,* when critics make reference to the erotics of the novel, they tend to attach Chal's self-announced "queerness" as relevant to male same-sex desire, to his lack of interest in women, or, in the case of Parker, to an absence of sexual interest or orientation. The latter serves a peculiar feature of the criticism because autoeroticism cannot even be named as a possibility. I'm arguing that the most relevant aspects of erotics the critics have attended to relate in some rather strange and interesting ways to masturbation whether in relation to women, men, or no one else. The novel creates a space for autoerotic potential that otherwise might be seen as the absence of sexuality, or even its failure to be articulated through an identitarian lens. This becomes all the more salient given Chal's active desire for solitude, his fascination with language, and his awkward sociality.

As might be expected in a protagonist-centered novel of the early twentieth century, *Sundown* lays the groundwork for Chal's character development in chapters devoted to his childhood, especially poignant in that they describe what are potentially erotic experiences. First, to examine the overlap of homoerotic and autoerotic connotation, consider Chal's interest, as a child, in the image of Jesus and a Roman soldier among a set of picture cards given him by his father's cousin. Just as the scene of crucifixion fascinates "him so that he couldn't look away from it, although he wanted very much to do so" so too does the image of the "soldier in those short skirts, with his

beautifully muscled legs and arms" hold his attention (19). Mathews notes too that he "all day … thought of that Roman's face" (19). Snyder suggests that Chal's subsequent act of "tak[ing] a pencil and tr[ying] to obliterate the soldier" is evidence of the purging of "same-sex desire … all too typical of queer youths growing up in homophobic environments" (35). This interpretation is not unconvincing and the (phallic) erotics here are striking given the multiple acts of penetration represented in this sequence: that of Chal puncturing the card; that of the nails puncturing hands and feet; that of the soldier puncturing Jesus's side with a spear; and that of the soldier puncturing Chal.[3]

But at the same time that this attempted erasure could be understood as the purging of homoeroticism, it can also be read as an *enactment* of Chal's autoeroticism. This particular scene utilizes what might be identified as masturbatory language and imagery found elsewhere in the novel: "The pencil marks didn't seem to have the desired *effect* and he *rubbed harder*, but still no use. In his anger and his defeat the tears *came* again" (19, emphasis added). Mathews consistently discusses Chal's failed attempts to create "desired effects," to achieve self-satisfaction and, interestingly, in many of these instances of failed self-gratification, Chal cries. And he does this when he goes off alone, purging his desires in non-social contexts. Here we have the possibility that since the novel does not articulate sexual desire explicitly, it finds expression covertly, as if it too must purge its own desires. These particular descriptions of excretion of liquids from the ducts of his eyes relate to both other bodily emissions (particularly ejaculation of semen) and to Chal's always crying in *isolation*, a significant feature to consider since Mathews

[3] I suggest the latter possibility since the "tear" (\tir\) of Mathews' phrase "he felt a tear on his hand" (19) could be heard as \ter\, a not unlikely scenario given the way Chal's wild imagination at this point in his life often blends reality and fantasy.

frequently identifies Chal's desire to be alone as strange and "queer." In one of these sequences in which Chal departs from community and family to enjoy the Osage landscape, he "trie[s] to dance" and "chant[s] an Osage song" (71). But when a "feeling that he was being overpowered caused him to stop," the narrator explains that Chal "sat down and lowered his head, and *something hot fell on his thigh*" (71, emphasis added). Since Mathews not once in this paragraph refers to crying or tears (though it seems obvious) the phrase "something hot" could be opened up to a masturbatory reading. That *it* falls on his thigh, much like the tear that falls on his hand in the earlier scenario, highlights, perhaps, this as well. Mathews continues to explain that Chal "got up and looked around as if he expected to see someone spying on him" (71). The suspicion of surveillance here relates to another bout of crying (alone in his bed at night), described in an earlier passage, in which Chal "would come suddenly to the realization that his mother might discover the wet spot later, and would stop crying" (44), as he would, in a similar manner, possibly, attempt to cover up evidence of masturbation out of a sense of discovery, shame, and threat of punishment. Mathews later heightens the issue of surveillance in the scene of equine copulation discussed earlier, wherein Chal seems to find it necessary to observe that the white boys "look around at the undergrowth as though expecting someone to come and catch them in some crime" (37). Chal's bodily expressions and self-consciousness are just as intense when he is alone as when he is with other people.

While Mathews' consistent use of "queer" might resonate with the sexual potential in *Sundown*, the term itself, as should be obvious, registers on multiple levels of meaning. Chal's queerness should be understood additionally as deviant non-normative

acts, as, in this case, evidence of an autoerotic force informing Chal's creative and critical potential, or, as Sedgwick suggests, as queer performativity, the "name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame" (*Touching Feeling* 61). One of the things that Chal seems to identify as "queer" about himself is his fascination with language, with both crude and elegant speech and writing. Significantly, whether under the pressure of his own needs, or under the pressure of social expectations, Chal often maintains a sense of privacy with respect to his admiration for language. In this sense, his relationship to the "power of the word," as discussed in the first chapter, is a solitary, non-social affair. He finds in the power of language the ability, or at least the potential, to minimize shame in contexts where it seeks to be maximized. For example, when several young boys at his school harass Chal, Mathews reveals that in response to moments like these, "always when his spirit was hurt," Chal curses and he never directs this specific language "to anyone or anything in particular, but muttered them to himself and immediately he felt that he had somewhat lessened the damage to his spirit" (29). The description suggests an autoerotic investment in language particularly since cursing does not, for Chal, have a grammar or target in creating effects. We can imagine that Chal does not say "fuck it" or "fuck you." Rather, he simply says, "fuck." In this case, Chal's fascination with language has to do with taking pleasure in the materiality of the signifier, in its sounds as it comes out of the body, and in cursing's particular effects on his own body – the lessening of pain. As N. Scott Momaday might say of him, his cursing, "which had no being beyond sound, no visible substance, would once again have shown him whole to himself" (53). Chal's performance of language is queer in the sense that it deviates from what is imagined as the normal communicative function of language.

It is the working of language in the absence of others. Chal utilizes the restorative (and perhaps pleasurable) power of cursing when he fails to integrate himself into spaces of homosociality (at the fraternity at the University of Oklahoma: "I'm a damned fool" (103)); when he fails to embed himself in specific acts of heterosexuality (after fumbling over his words in a telephone conversation with a popular sorority woman: "Dammit" (148)); and when he fails to imagine himself confronting racism (in bed, unable to sleep: "I wish I didn't have a drop of God damn' Indian blood in my veins" (160)). The pain alleviated by these acts of cursing is not the pain of *isolation*, but rather the pain of being pressured to fit into certain models of allo-identification, modes of being in the world that do not make room for the way Chal might find pleasure in being alone, for his particular auto-identification.

To examine again the overlap of eroticisms, and to continue with the discussion of potential queer utterances, consider Chal's fascination with Mr. Granville, professor of geology at the University of Oklahoma, a relationship between men that Snyder identifies as homoerotic because it is an intense connection unlike Chal's interest "sometimes superficially directed toward women" (30) and distinct from relationships with any other character in the novel. Snyder argues that "Chal is attracted to what other students … mock: Granville's queerness" (46). "But what," to borrow from Sedgwick's description of Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, "if love is defined only by its gender of object-choice, are we to make of" Chal's desire for isolation and, additionally, fascination with language (*Tendencies* 114)? Significantly, Mathews explains that students at the university thought Granville "was queer because he took long walks *by himself*, wouldn't accept dinner invitations, and lived *by himself* in an old stone house" (172, emphasis

added). This first attribute, Snyder suggests, "is clearly one that endears Granville to Chal" (46). At the same time that this particular allo-identification depends on shared interest in auto-identification, it should be emphasized that Granville "fascinated Chal with his *beautiful words*; English that flowed softly and was almost lyrical" (Mathews 172, emphasis added). Granville's sense of language seems to be the quality that most endears him to Chal. This particular aspect of the relationship comes to a climax, so to speak, when Granville identifies, out loud, a "circling bird" as the "buteo borealis," an act of enunciation that "thrills" Chal and "fill[s] [him] with pleasure": "And that was the way to pronounce 'borealis,' was it?" (173). Since Mathews tells us that "there were certain words … which fascinated [Chal]" and that "he whispered them to himself occasionally when deeply stirred" (156), we can imagine "buteo borealis" as a phrase encountered by Chal in private acts of reading, and as a phrase that he found pleasure in attempting to pronounce for himself, much in the same way that he experiences a certain sense of pleasure in uttering curse words. Enmeshed in experiences of silence, his solitary, verbal ejaculations both complement his quietness and also provide a kind of tether to another person through his excited, yet still silent, responses.

The novel is interesting in the way that it continually forwards these notions of excited speech, ejaculations, if you will, that delight and bring pleasure to the protagonist but do not cohere with types of speech associated with articulation nor with authentic culture. This particular scene with Granville, moreover, overlays potential homoeroticism with what might again be identified as masturbatory imagery, suggestive language that does not conform to social forms of sex. Chal expresses his frustration in not being able to communicate to Granville his excitement about the phrase "buteo

borealis" by "getting to his feet, and moving aimlessly forward," and, importantly, "by putting his *hand in his pocket* and taking out his knife, then *putting it back again*" (173-174, emphasis added). The masturbatory resonance of the up-and-down motion of his hands is accelerated here by his fascination with Granville's language. It is as if Mathews cannot help but imbue certain scenes with potentially sexual language, suggesting that the novel might be read for the roundabout ways it does indeed express desire, particularly through these strange utterances that hover between the realms of silence (thinking) and articulation.

Just as "the paths of allo-identification are likely to be strange and recalcitrant," as Sedgwick writes in *Epistemology of the Closet* so too "are the paths of auto-identification" (59). Following from this I want to point out that Chal's autoerotic, energetic fascination with language is not exclusive to acts of self-speaking nor to relationships between men. This is to say that the erotics of the novel tied closely to masturbation do not attach necessarily to a gendered object of choice. Masturbation need not be lonely, nor need it necessarily be in need of company. A particularly salient scene in the novel – with respect to what Chal might *do* with his particular queerness – involves his desire to utilize language as communication while on a date with Blo, the popular sorority girl at the university. Chal "wishe[s] intensely that he could say funny things to make her laugh" and though "he had never thought of talking" this way to "anyone else," he, "for some mysterious reason," wanted to with her (157). Since he "couldn't say the funny things which people always said," and here he seems to have in mind the genres of flirting he knows to be constitutive of his fraternity brothers' heteroerotic experiences, Chal constructs in his mind an artful description of the landscape that surrounds them, a

description that he "believed he could tell her" in order to make up for the humorous things he could not say: "how the wind made the dust in the river bed look like a smoke cloud; about the moonlight on the tongues of water crawling over the sand" (157). To say such things out loud, what Chal guesses "were not the things to talk about", would make her "think he was crazy" (157).

What is striking about this desired model of communication is that Chal sees the possibilities of connections between his particular sense of language (the sensuous, bodily metaphors of "tongues" and "crawling"), the unification of the various realms of river, shore, and sky, and a particular response on behalf of Blo, perhaps that of amusement or fascination. Moreover, this desire that does not get articulated gives lie to Snyder's claim that Chal "never really has anything to say to her, not being able to conceive of anything else of interest to him, which is frustrating for them both" (42). It is all the more significant given that it is one of the only times in the novel we see Chal on the verge of sharing with others his own experiential realities having to do with silence and isolation. In that sense, it might be that he wants to be instructive, to guide someone else in the pleasures he seeks alone, to create, it could be said, a mutual masturbatory experience. Even Louis Owens, who elsewhere attributes these kinds of lonely experiences to cultural alienation, suggests that in this moment between Chal and Blo, his "Osage self has achieved the upper hand in this political struggle, reversing the pattern that denigrates an Indian world-view, removing his date from the referential context that made him feel 'too dark' and displacing her into an Indian system of reference" (56). Ultimately, however, the scene is presented as a failure because Chal does not speak to her in a way that he feels necessary, and this has to do with his consistent thought of not

wanting to seem strange. What goes on his head are these queer utterances right at the verge of articulation but that do not get released, and this is the result of his feeling ashamed.

Indeed, the paths of allo- and auto- identification are strange and, importantly, the novel demonstrates ways in which these pathways are obstructed by situating Chal's particular erotics within the sexual politics of federal Indian law, policy, and Osage community. For example, Robert Warrior makes the claim in *Tribal Secrets* that "Mathews did not intend *Sundown* to be merely a story of how an individual deals with personal identity," an organizing principle of many studies of the novel (54). "Rather," Warrior continues, "Mathews evokes a historical period of intense importance for Osage people and communities and attempts to sort out how the political strategies of various groups of Osages played out and what possible future might exist" (54). One of the striking features of *Sundown* is the way that Mathews describes the impact of the Dawes Act on Osages in Oklahoma, and creates a portrait of a community who has surrendered a relative amount of tribal integrity by accepting the policy of allotments. The policy reflects the federal government's endorsement of the gender normative category of the male head of the household, of the nuclear family, who holds title to the 160 acres, the allotment; an ironic gesture in which "civilizing" tendencies also serve to "queer" Natives by, for example, "forc[ing] Indian men into women's work," thus "directly attacking," as Bethany Schneider suggests, "traditional male and female gender roles" (Justice "Introduction" 18). Notice, too, the visual echo of allo- in both allotment and allo-identification that highlights the heteronormative assumptions of the Dawes Act, legislation holding as self-evident the "family": husband, wife, children. This is the

tumultuous world in which Chal's particular queerness operates, and it certainly provides a context for thinking about where shame comes from. His frustrations are political. He cannot get excited about allotment in ways his fellow citizens might, thus making him queer.

Mathews does not enact a critique of the United States exclusively. He creates a rather unflattering characterization of the Osages as a whole. What is interesting to consider here is what happens to both the term "queer," as it is used in the novel, and queerness itself within the context of this criticism. Though Snyder uses the phrase "he certainly didn't want anyone to know that he was queer" (Mathews 90) in the title of his article, he fails to account for the term's particular usage in this instance. The sentence comes at the end of a paragraph that describes Chal's viewpoint, his politics, with respect to Osage sovereignty. Chal finds a certain "ugliness" in the era of allotment (which opened up lands to non-Indian settlement) and, specifically, in the modern buildings that were "expressions of a race still influenced by an environment thousands of miles across the ocean" (90). In this case, Chal envisions a community that should have forcefully asserted its sovereignty in the face of territorial expansion. To express such an opinion, however, "would have been like a sacrilege and certainly unpatriotic": "One believed in his country and his state, and accepted the heroics of the race for land in the new territory, and all the virtues of the Anglo-Saxon; the romantics and righteousness of their winning the West, as taught by his history" (90). From Chal's perspective, the Osages have failed politically and culturally because they have accepted a vision of normalcy that hinders Osage expression. He does not dare "suggest his thoughts to anyone" because he did not want "anyone to know that he was queer" (90), or, perhaps, because

anyone he told might have to consider the value of their own non-normativity. This suggests that the novel does not tolerate a communal ethos of shared values, the deliberate presentation of a tribal norm that holds out the promise for authentic Indian culture.

In the latter chapters of *Sundown*, Chal tries unsuccessfully to integrate himself into the newly fashioned social world among the Osages affected by the policy of allotment. Unique to Osage experience in the Dawes Era is the fact that they were the only tribe to have reserved mineral rights, thus generating considerable wealth in the oil boom of Oklahoma. The setting is characterized by a frenzy of sociality: constant attendance at parties and other forms of recreation, frequent consumption of drugs and alcohol in social settings, and numerous acts of heteroeroticism. Chal simply does not fit in here and he gets so wrapped up in this world that, for the first time, he felt that "he must have a drink" and that "every nerve in his body called for alcohol, and his head was bursting" (251). This need for alcohol suggests repression of whatever energies might have defined him before and it seems that the high he gains is but a brief, unproductive transcendence of the normal. By the end of the novel, Chal tries to conjure up his fascination with language by "repeating to himself, 'extravaganza,' without reason" (296). At this point, he again tries to find the comfort he once found in isolating himself from the community and luxuriating in non-communicative speech that presumably is not socially sanctioned because it so strange, so asocial. In attempting to reach back to the pleasures of childhood, he dances drunkenly *by himself*: "He was in pain and he danced frantically for some sort of climax; that sense of completeness that consummates the creative urge; an orgasm of the spirit. But he couldn't … release his dammed up

emotion" (297). Mathews' coupling of matter and spirit, the ambiguous relationship between orgasm and spirit, demonstrates the possibility for solitude and silence to emerge as havens for integrity.

In the anti-climatic climax of his ultimate failure, Chal's autoeroticism has been rubbed out by the shifting political and social context in Osage country that fails to embrace queerness. In the end, he never finds release, not in his community or even with himself, and he has been far removed from the promise of silent and strangely articulate experiences that held out autoerotic potential. In a final irony, given all that he has invested in the powers of solitary acts of language and experience, he tells his mother, rather unconvincingly given that the novel is structured on episodes that always end in lack of fulfillment, "I'm goin' to Harvard, and take law – I'm gonna be a great orator" (311). The final words he speaks in the novel offer a throwback to both the dreaminess of his childhood and the literal flights of fancy he took as a pilot, "There isn't anything to flyin' any more" (311).

The promise of uncovering sex in Native literature is that it will serve as an index, and indeed affirmation, of cultural affiliation. This happens only if we presume, however, that experiences of sex can be attached to positive affects of joy and pride, or of other positive experiences of integrity such as healing and restoration. We have seen in this chapter and the one before it that Native literature sometimes does not provide such features of erotic potential. In *Elsie's Business*, for example, what is perceived as traditional – the oral Lakota culture Oscar consistently presents – does not serve as an adequate cultural response to sexual violence either in terms of a victim's sense of healing or integrity nor in creating a context for social justice. In *Sundown*, the erotics of

the novel, whether they be hetero-, homo-, or auto-, provide no guarantee of affiliation or hope. Shame and frustration persist as key features of Chal's life. It would seem, however, that an authentic Indian cultural perspective on sex is waiting in the novel to be uncovered so that Chal could be liberated from shame. This is why the attention to homoeroticism seems so powerful an approach in interpreting the novel because it holds out some political promise for imagining sexual liberation and freedom flourishing under tribal sovereignty. Yet, we know this not to be the case given the rampant homophobia in Indian country.

The silences regarding sex the novel provides seem worth holding onto precisely because they are so enmeshed in experiences of shame, suggesting, perhaps, that it is an unavoidable characteristic of identity and community. What might be significant about attention to the autoerotic is that it is a presumably universal experience of sex oftentimes attached to shame and, in this sense, shame itself, although no doubt attributable to them, cannot be reduced down to specific repressive cultural, social, and historical contexts. Behaviors of frustration might be seen as more than a response to repression. We are missing out on the complexity of Native literature if this is all we care to see. Additionally, the attention to uncovering the possibilities of masturbation offers another route to seeing how Native novels might fail to produce a communal ethos, a sense of identification that tethers readers to "authentic" culture. Indeed, if novels fail to generate community in ways we expect them to, that is, in creating experiences of alienation, silence, frustration, and shame, then it may be that the autoerotic is already constitutive of literary pursuits.

Why We Can't Listen to Cogewea's Grandmother

Much of the dissertation has channeled energy into disrupting linear trajectories imposed on protagonists and the novels they inhabit, finding moments of silence and modes of diminished articulation that challenge the possibility or need for something like communal solidarity or even therapeutic wholeness. In this sense, the novels' abilities to disrupt formulations regarding voice depend on scrutinizing narrative representations of agency that have an ambiguous or skewed connection to the vitality of speech and articulation. The dynamic approach to a protagonist's vitality, especially in connection to what is perceived as traditional, is made possible by decades-long assumptions that the landscape of Native novels is inhabited by impaired, traumatized, and weakened central characters. The goal of this study has not been to strictly invalidate such diagnostic assessments of these protagonists but to put into question critics' insistence on resolution, often grounded in "finding" voice, tradition, authenticity, wellness, and so on. In the case of Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*, in contrast to a myopic approach, I argue that critics have offered a much more nuanced approach to "voice" in the novel, particularly in delineating the voices of author, character, and narrator. In doing so, however, they have often insisted on stratifying the feminist voices of the novel; one net effect of which is to dignify certain variations over others, demanding, in the end, a triumph of an authentic voice the novel supposedly puts forward. In this chapter, I suggest that critics have missed out on an opportunity to redeem a voice in the novel that venerates the so-called "oral tradition" because they have been too much invested in a positive outcome. The protagonist and title character of the novel, although she becomes essentially muted by

voices of tradition that challenge her individuality, exemplifies a counter-voice of orthodoxy subtly announced in the novel, making the ending a richly ironic one.

At times simply defined or derided by some critics as a Western or frontier romance, *Cogewea* takes place during the early twentieth century on the Flathead Reservation in Montana (the site at which, coincidentally, D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* would take place a decade later). The community of cowboys at the H.B. Ranch consists of Cogewea, an outspoken young "mixed blood" woman educated at Carlisle Indian School and her sisters, one of whom is married to the white owner of the ranch. Cogewea enjoys the company of fellow ranch hands, many of whom engage in pranking and teasing: one of whom, Jim LaGrinder, flirts with the protagonist. The occasion of the novel is marked by the arrival of two characters: Cogewea's grandmother, referred to as the Stemteema, and Alfred Densmore, a white easterner teased as a "tenderfoot" who schemes to win the affections of Cogewea to get to her money (although she does not have any). On its surface, the novel appears to be governed by the search for identity motif and the romance plot. Cogewea's mixed blood existential dilemma becomes mediated by her choice between two suitors, Densmore and LaGrinder, because the latter, unlike Densmore, is a mixed blood Flathead long-time resident rather than a white "easterner." Cogewea consistently rebuffs LaGrinder's advances, considering him more of a sibling. Though often engaged in debate over cultural and ethnic matters, Cogewea becomes increasingly smitten with Densmore, and despite her grandmother's relentless disapproval, she decides to run away with him. The decision proves to be disastrous. He betrays her, beats her, and makes his escape. Cogewea eventually decides she does love LaGrinder more than a brother, and the novel

ends in two marriages: the protagonist's and her sister's to a Frenchman who had become the butt of jokes among the cowboys but eventually proves himself worthy of the young woman.

When it comes to underscoring Native literature's representations of agency, we have seen much attention paid to the vibrancy of voice within the fictional worlds novels allow readers and critics to inhabit, and the sense that the search for language results in the conditions for a character's redemption. *House Made of Dawn* has served as an ideal representation of the search for an adequate language that would express authentic identity. While I challenge such impulses in the world of Native literary studies, I have understood that novels do indeed provide such motifs, even as they might be undermined by other narrative elements. The critical redemptive moves of "finding voice" in the case of *Cogewea*, however, look a bit different. One of the major concerns has to do with locating a Native woman's voice *early on* in the history of Native novels. Published in 1926, but written more than a decade before, the novel is one of the first Native-written works in the twentieth century. Mourning Dove's male contemporaries (John Joseph Mathews and D'Arcy McNickle), who wrote a decade or so after publication of her novel, have received much more critical attention. As a result, we might imagine attention to her novel motivated by a resistance to an overwhelmingly male-centered literary history. This also means that energy directed toward understanding the significance of the novel has to do with a kind of "recovery" work. Note, for example, that in a review in a women's studies journal in the early 1980s, Rayna Green suggests "no feminist tract and flawed as a 'Western,' the book nevertheless deserves a feminist and literary audience, certainly one interested in some very different perceptions about

Indians, Native women, the West, and half-breed" (221). This perspective sets the stage for subsequent readings, promoting the understanding that while not an aesthetic achievement – and it's interesting that Mourning Dove's male contemporaries do not seem to be treated with the same kind of evaluative skepticism – the novel should be read for its place in Native and women's literary history.

Picked up with much more urgency in later years, the authorial voice of became a central issue, and it is here where the stratification of the novel's voices becomes a complicated strategy for attempting to locate agency in relation to a woman author's ability to articulate an authentic identity. The problem I'm going to identify within this critical impulse to uphold and celebrate a supposed authentic Native voice is that critics tend to be inconsistent regarding how they evaluate such possibilities, at times celebrating the critics' need for authenticity to the detriment of a character's need for individuality, celebrating the character's voice at the expense of an author's, and at other times celebrating the voice of "elderly wisdom" over a younger generation's. In this sense, a kind of hierarchy of articulation emerges that, at times, elevates the "Indian" novelistic discourse, and, at other times, privileges the novel's women characters: Cogewea herself, to some degree, but ultimately her grandmother, the Stemteema.

The authorial voice of the novel has become a central issue. The key task of critics often involves setting up the issue of the novel's authorship and then attempting to solve it by mapping out certain features of language, particularly having to do with diction but also the philosophy espoused by the language, and the relationship of philosophy and language to identity. Seemingly from the beginning, criticism has focused on the relationship between Mourning Dove and Lucius McWhorter, the author's

collaborator and sponsor, so to speak. Rayna Green's review essay, for example, sets up the dynamic as one significant in the history of women's writing, what she calls "that all-too-familiar female-male collaborateurship" (218). The battle for authorial control rests in what Green identifies as a history of patriarchal injunctions on women's ability to write or to, at the very least, claim authorship or maintain control over what they have written. The stakes in naming Mourning Dove as the ultimate author of *Cogewea* have to do with challenging the overextension of male privilege in naming themselves as arbiters of writing and authorial identity. This clears a space for promoting a Native women's literary history of novel writing, and as one way for appreciating the significance of the novel.

The issue of authorship might be argued as a valid approach to the novel's voice since Mourning Dove herself seems to have announced authorship as a debatable claim. In a letter written to McWhorter after reading the final manuscript of the novel, Mourning Dove writes: "I have just got through the book *Cogewea*, and am surprised at the changes that you made. I think they are fine, and you made a tasty dressing like a cook would do with a fine meal … I felt like it was some one elses book and not mine at all. In fact the finishing touches are put there by you, and I have never seen it" (qtd. in Owens 43). No doubt her commentary speaks volumes to potential problems of interpolation, but, just as her critics, she fails to delineate the exact nature of the collaboration. One of the most peculiar features of arguments having to do with the novel's authentic authorship is that all evidence cited about which authors contributed passages is entirely intuitive, even though it is not presented that way. In a rhetorical sleight of hand, many critics might quote a specific passage, and casually pronounce its diction as decidedly "non-Indian,"

presuming to share with their audience assumptions about what can readily be discerned as "Indian" and "not-Indian" voice. The power of the novel to articulate a Native point-of-view depends on the reader sorting through the various discursive modes and understanding how the novel values certain ones over others.

There does not seem to be much deliberation required. An audience for Native literature, presumably, does not need to be convinced of the ability of Mourning Dove's voice to win out over "Western" voices. This creates an ironic position since critics often imagine themselves speaking for their readers. Rayna Green, for example, casually remarks that "we can easily separate Mourning Dove's tale from McWhorter's text, and to that tale we look for substance" (218). Owens adds, in reference to the letter from Mourning Dove to McWhorter, "in reading the novel, it is not difficult to discover the 'tasty dressing' of inflated language [meaning McWhorter's]" (43). Furthermore, he posits that the "the reader feels throughout *Cogewea* the presence of a political disturbance permeating the text as the voices of Mourning Dove and McWhorter struggle to be heard one over the other – with Mourning Dove's easily winning out" (44). The novel purportedly makes available for readers a clear distinction among these modes and voices, and critics often take sides with "Mourning Dove's," not only because it is the "Indian" voice of the novel, but also because it is more pleasurable for readers to hear. This kind of evaluative approach to the quality of language comes up rather consistently. For example, Green remarks that Mourning Dove's "cowboy speech is funky, funny, and highly preferable to McWhorter's Latinate drivel or to stock 'Indian" pidgin … Even the Stemteema's speech, which could easily fall into the standard oratorical mode reserved for chiefs and defeated warriors, is palatable and interesting, if formal" (220). It is a

presumption, rather than a question, what forms of articulation are to be valued for their artistry and authenticity.

The problem with this approach to the novel is twofold. First, despite their insistence, critics often cannot seem to delineate with much certainty where Mourning Dove's voice ends and McWhorter's begins. Jace Weaver, in his chapter on the novel, makes similar claims to Owens and Green, and often pays attention to diction and length. The relationship between form and content seems to disrupt his (and others') attempts to delineate authorship. In one instance, he notes that "Cogewea responds in a lengthy monologue, undoubtedly influenced by McWhorter but nonetheless reflecting Mourning Dove's belief" (109). In a similar fashion, Green marks McWhorter's language as "stilted, rhetorical, and argumentative" and has "Cogewea and others express very real feelings in an impossible and false language" (217). Nevertheless, she argues, Cogewea "speaks from the Native heart but from a white mouth" (217). While it has been assumed that the differing voices can easily be demarcated, Weaver and Green suggest the possibility that a Native philosophy, or Mourning Dove's point of view, has an agency all its own, even when voiced by a "white mouth." Following from this, it might seem an almost unnecessary task to figure out where exactly McWhorter speaks and Mourning Dove does not since they both can express something of value for an audience seeking to uncover indigenous knowledge or experience. Nevertheless, the battle for the soul of the novel relies on casting out the "false and impossible language" in order for the authentic one to predominate.

The second problem with the seemingly uneven approach to sorting out the voices of the novel is that the evidence for McWhorter's presence in the novel is more felt than

observed. When analyzing passages from the novel that have been singled out for their vocal distinctiveness, critics will utilize language of uncertainty: "*undoubtedly* influenced by McWhorter" (Weaver 109, emphasis added); "allusions *very likely* added by McWhorter" (Owens 43, emphasis added); "both of whom *apparently* had quite different ideas about the nature of the project" (Wilson 69, emphasis added). Some of us, it seems, are hearing voices, disembodied and faceless, and we have assured ourselves we know who speaks. Green, Owens, Weaver, and Michael Wilson make no reference to any specific manuscript. Mourning Dove's letter to McWhorter makes the case for some level of anxiety regarding authorial command, but without direct textual evidence, no reader will be able to go through the novel and excise the decidedly non-Indian voice of the novel.

While many critics treat *Cogewea* as a battleground wherein the voices of Mourning Dove and Lucullus Virgil McWhorter fight it out for authority over the novel as a whole, what is at stake in such a contest is a muted, if at all pronounced, point. This is to say that criticism has neglected to foreground the assumption that any one particular voice should be heard loudest and clearest over another. Why we want Mourning Dove to win in the battle of voice remains unclear, but we might guess it has to do with the identity of the text itself. Haunted by the possibility of a non-Native voice infiltrating the Native literary world, critics remain steadfast in convincing others that the novel must be primarily Native-authored, and if even it is not, the novel at least presents itself as favoring a Native voice. Paradoxically, though, through its voicing of multiple discourses, the novel remains silent in terms of definitively naming its rightful author. It is in this state of authorial uncertainty that we might simply suspend the question of

ownership. It might very well be that the novel *is* primarily McWhorter's, but even Mourning Dove's complaints make no explicit comment about disavowal. The anxiety regarding a Native author's absence of voice may continue to make the novel worthy of consideration.

Indeed, thinking to the side of the issue of authorship, critics have also considered the voices that predominate within the fictive realm, particularly those of the protagonist and of the Stemteema. The emphasis on the protagonist makes a quite a bit of sense because Cogewea, unlike her literary cousins in the novels discussed previously in the dissertation, speaks more vibrantly and more powerfully. While critics interpret the novel in terms of it challenging stereotypes of the mixed-blood (or 'half-breed' denigrated as "degenerate products of miscegenation, distrusted by both cultures and fitting in nowhere," as Weaver has it (104)), criticism also takes note of Cogewea's strongly articulate disposition. Her dilemma is an existential and social one, not having been impaired by some physical and psychic trauma (as with Abel and Elsie of Momaday and Washburn's novels) or by a painful, awkward shyness (as with Chal of Mathews' novel). She wields powers of language that characters of subsequent decades simply do not, and it is this capability that can serve as the source of her alienation or estrangement since she has no "articulate" counterpart. The discursive prowess of the woman protagonist in a novel set mostly in a world of men seems especially useful since she continually needs to assert herself in terms of their patronizing, teasing, flirting, and other forms of social interaction we might not usually see among a cast of almost exclusively male characters. Chal in Mathews' *Sundown*, for example, is someone whose lack of linguistic competence seems equated with his social capabilities. Nevertheless, Mourning Dove's

novel comes to be dominated by the marriage plot and her voice becomes increasingly diminished.

Mourning Dove becomes celebrated as a model of sorts by critics. Owens argues, for example, that "Mourning Dove creates a female protagonist firmly in control of a language that is at the same time liminal, emerging from the thresholds of both Indian and white worlds, and forceful" (42). Green argues for the brilliance of feminine voices in the novel as well: Cogewea's "give-and-take discussions … remain some of the most interesting scenes in the book since they articulate, without sentimentality, the curious and perpetual conflict of the 'half-breed'" (219). She makes note, too, of the grandmother's abilities: "For when we hear the Stemteema speak, we know that Cogewea comes from a tradition of female eloquence and uses that tradition to speak her mind and get what she wants" (219). We can see that this assessment of the protagonist differs quite a bit from the kind of diagnostic approaches that tend to dominate critical contexts for protagonists in the later Native novels whose pathologies are made evident, some would argue, by their linguistic incompetence. Here we have for the first time in this study a protagonist who is clearly articulate.

When the discussion turns to Cogewea's linguistic competence, the importance of the distinction between Mourning Dove and McWhorter, at times, falters. When it comes to her ability to think and speak quickly and eloquently, Green remarks that "both her McWhorter-inspired and her Mourning Dove-produced speeches display this ability" (219). In criticism, the agential potential of a Native feminine voice within the story becomes a central focus, allowing characters to speak without necessarily relying on the identity of who may have written their words. In his chapter in *Writing Home*, Michael

Wilson drives home the point of Cogewea's speech abilities, particularly for her ability to assert self-determination. Wilson observes that her "multilingual abilities are not lost on other people at the ranch, nor is she unaware of her linguistic dexterity" (72). In the course of the novel, men often find themselves stuttering and stammering as if they are vocalizing bafflement at her careful and considered use of language. The self-awareness seems to be a key characteristic of the protagonist to which Wilson especially attends: "at certain moments in the book, Cogewea consciously shifts to different voices when the need arises … Cogewea thus moves freely among these different types of discourse; indeed, she asserts her right to be part of them" (72). He uses the example of Cogewea using the "language of her formal education to confront a bank clerk who considers her unable to handle her own financial affairs" (72).

What becomes a celebrated, yet sometimes troubled, aspect of the book then is Cogewea's seeming exceptionalism. At many turns, she dazzles with language, code-switches to suit her purposes, and reins in outlandish behavior with joking and insults like any good verbally dexterous rancher. We have not seen this kind of praise for heightened verbal abilities elsewhere in the criticism because we do not often encounter protagonists with such capabilities. Such claims about the protagonist ring hollow, however, when we consider that, to borrow from the example Wilson cites, critics take up the position of the bank teller, questioning Mourning Dove's ability to handle her own linguistic affairs. It is an odd, even paternalistic, gesture to elevate Cogewea for her discursive mobility and then to claim in the same breath that Mourning Dove herself could not possibly write in modes that do not seem "Indian." In this sense, while explicitly announcing the battle for control between Mourning Dove and McWhorter (in which Mourning Dove "wins" because her

voice predominates), critics also implicitly pit Mourning Dove against Cogewea, author battling, and losing to it might seem, her literary progeny. This is a further extension of the irony of many critics' insistence on delineating the different types of language: one kind of Native voice ends up becoming privileged over another but critics want to promote a homogenized "Native voice" representative of their endorsed norms of identity.

In the context of Native voices, however, the protagonist's grandmother, the Stemteema, would seem to emerge as the ultimate winner. She emerges in the critical context as the novel's moral center, the ideal vehicle for the "oral tradition" (especially poignant since the "oral tradition," according to many critics, seems to be the most important "voice" for any Native writer or character), and, as Green puts it, she is "essential to the novel for she is Cogewea's foil against which all action must be judged" (219). I suggest, however, that the Stemteema is a peculiar focalization of criticism because she is marginalized in the novel itself, a minor character stepping in to tell a story or offer a prohibition from time to time, and because her importance stems from an external value imposed on the text having to do with the perceived virtues of "elderly wisdom," the "value" I will later argue the novel subverts.

The novel builds up anticipation for the arrival of the grandmother, remarking on Cogewea's affection for her. At the same time, however, she is presented as a marginal subject, even "primitive-minded" (16). Employing a familiar trope, mirroring the "wise old Indian characters who abound in non-Indian works about Native people" (Green 219), the novel continually constructs the Stemteema as outside of modernity, existing in the past, in danger of vanishing. The narrator sometimes, along with Cogewea occasionally, offers somewhat derogatory language about the grandmother. She's

described as "lingering pathetically in the sunset of a closing era" (41). Continuing in the "ancient manner of her fading race" (88), it would seem she does not occupy the same temporal and spatial, even culturally relevant, positions as Cogewea. Despite all these descriptors, critics have assumed that readers will look upon her with affection. Her status as having an important voice in the novel is textually unwarranted. In fact, even though she arrives early on, and is present in the first third of the novel, readers do not even catch a glimpse of her actually saying anything until a little over one hundred pages in. It is as if her presence alone establishes her authenticity. Her silence speaks volumes. Indeed, her presence prompts a kind of misreading on Wilson's behalf. He insists that the novel, for example, "sets up a balanced tension between the Stemteema and Densmore … [they] arrive precisely at the same time, off the same train, on the same wagon, and at the bidding of Cogewea" (76). After the arrival, however, things do not quite balance out as Densmore is given much more dialogue and screen time, so to speak. Despite the imbalance, Wilson and others continue to insist that her presence weighs heavily on the novel's ability to voice a Native point-of-view.

Of course, by the end of it all, the elder has spoken enough to convince readers, supposedly, of her relevance in shaping the destiny of Cogewea partly because she discerns the intentions of Alfred Densmore, the white suitor and villain, in ways her granddaughter could not, but perhaps should have. More importantly, Rayna Green and others interpret the novel's "sound articulation of the Stemteema's role" as allowing "both the novel itself and its heroine their articulation of major features of tribal tradition" (219-220). She serves as a kind of cultural repository, "preserv[ing] the old ways … to assess, weigh, and judge information as well as to give spiritual

encouragement" (219). It is after her assessment of Densmore that the narrator begins to devote whole chapters to the grandmother's stories, inviting readers to sit along with Cogewea and bask in the brilliance of the "oral tradition." This tradition, it seems, is the most important voice the novel can conjure up, as far as the critics are concerned, and the stories told by the Stemteema serve more than a didactic or rhetorical function. The stories "provide a metanarrative of which the novel itself is a part … in *Cogewea*, the metanarrative consists of nonindigenous men taking indigenous women for wives, only to abandon them for wives they have elsewhere" (Wilson 82). As we have seen expressed in critical approaches to *House Made of Dawn*, and, as I have argued, resisted in *Elsie's Business* implicitly, critics claim that stories derived from oral traditions serve as a road map for how to traverse the novel as a whole. They guide the characters morally, and the readers in narrative fashion. According to this line of reasoning, in the hierarchy of voices, the Stemteema rises to the top of the pile, beating out McWhorter, Mourning Dove, and Cogewea herself.

The grandmother is meant to elicit admiration because what she says in some sense becomes true. Densmore will betray Cogewea. Cogewea and Densmore do seem to have analogues within the story. I suggest, however, that we might put into question the credibility of the Stemteema as a valid, feminist voice in the novel by scrutinizing other things she says, by examining some of the peculiar details of her stories, and by considering if the Stemteema can be the only mouthpiece for the oral tradition or only culturally relevant figure, as many critics seem to suggest. Firstly, simply regarding character, she generally lacks warmth and humor, the latter a curious absence given that the novel as a whole celebrates "teasing humor" that Owens suggests "permeates

American Indian communities and is universally ignored in writing about Indians" (48). She does not freely move among disparate discourses in ways that her granddaughter can. Dry and serious, the Stemteema provides a cold disposition through which her stories seem to serve a strictly didactic function.

More significantly, no critic has commented on her powers of coercion. She both bribes and threatens to disown Cogewea if she does not reject Densmore as a romantic partner and instead marry a "mixed blood." Although it may be the result of a treaty provision, the Stemteema appears to sell out her own people in bribing Cogewea: "If you marry in your own class, the mixed blood, I will gladly bless you with the Great Indian Spirit. I will divide with you my money which I am to receive from the Big White Chief for the forests belonging to my ancestors. I will give you horses and cattle. But if you take this Shoyahpee, I will forget that I ever had a grandchild" (250). What is important about this threat within the context of understanding voice in the novel is that it more explicitly announces how the marriage plot is to be shaped than the "oral tradition" stories, since those end in betrayal by a suitor, but not necessarily arguments for a better suitor. Here we have a maternal figure coercing her granddaughter into marriage, instead of offering and allowing for other routes to communal affirmation or belonging. In some sense, marriage would seem to be politicized by the Stemteema because she implicitly promotes a certain form of it necessary for cultural citizenship, and even, to some degree, material well-being. No doubt moving beyond the genericism of the wise old Indian character, the Stemteema seems to continue to elicit praise in the criticism despite her cruel route to preserving the old ways.

It is not, however, these off-handed comments that take central stage in underscoring the importance of "elderly wisdom." Indeed, the Stemteema is held in high esteem for her purported utilization of an Okanagan oral tradition. Perhaps attributing too much complexity and benevolence to her, Wilson suggests that although the grandmother "understands that she and Cogewea are different in many ways, she attempts to find ways to bring what is useful and relevant from her past to the present – that is, from the Okanogan culture to her mixed-blood granddaughter" (80). This would present an image of an elderly figure motivated by compassion. This persona we have previously seen satirically replicated and critiqued through Frances Washburn's representation of Oscar in *Elsie's Business*. The high praise, or really any praise at all, doled out by critics of Native novels seems to stem from the assumption of a cultural value regarding reverence bestowed to elders because of their experience, wisdom, knowledge, and hindsight. As a literary trope, elder figures often seem to hold a special role in the novel in relation to a protagonist's cultural and social configurations and potential transformations. On their route to identity, culture, and community, tribal protagonists sit at the feet of the pedagogue, willingly or not, and become the primary audience for traditional stories. The power of language bestowed to these figures in critical contexts seems to be warranted simply because they speak. Because someone tells the stories, they must be heard, and the wisdom "inherent" in them must be heeded. Given this strong impulse to favor such characters, the Stemteema stands as the sole arbiter of tradition and, following the argument about elderly wisdom, deserves to be heard over all others.

Two stories told by the elder command attention more so than others: the story of the Green-Blanket Feet and The Coming of the Shoyahpee. The author gives

considerable space to each, suggesting their significance by mere length and sectioning off from other parts of the text. The stories have the seeming purpose of orienting both readers and Cogewea herself toward the "right thing to do" when it comes to romantic possibilities. They also serve a melodramatic function in constructing Densmore as the outright villain of the story, as the stories seem to "place him in the oral tradition in a line of white men who treat indigenous women badly" (Wilson 79). The lesson conveyed here holds a peculiar valence in this particular community given that Cogewea's older sister has married a white man and that her younger sister marries a Frenchman and even goes to live in Europe. The standards endorsed by the Stemteema do not seem to be consistent. She does not seem to hold her other daughters in contempt or even target them as central interlocutors for the stories.

These inconsistencies matter very little given that the novel and Cogewea must be subordinated to tradition. The major dilemma imposed on Cogewea by critics has been her having to make a choice between Densmore and "tradition." She can either embrace tradition or suffer, as if her own community provides a perfectly safe haven which seems to contradict the volatile way it is depicted in the novel. Cogewea stands at the midpoint between her grandmother and Densmore. The stakes for cultural survival and continuity are high. Weaver suggests that "Cogewea herself very nearly comes to disaster with Densmore *when she forgets the old ways* and ignores the Stemteema's counsel not to marry the Amer-European" (109, emphasis added).Furthermore, Owens suggests her psychical integrity depends on her obeying her grandmother because in doing so she is able to turn "back toward the mixedblood Indian world, where a greater opportunity for coherence and self-knowledge exists" (47). Even though Cogewea "chooses to ignore the

Okanogan oral tradition," as Wilson argues, she "in fact relives the old stories, adding her name to the list of wronged indigenous women, affirming the truth and value of the stories" (70-71). Following Wilson, *Cogewea* itself becomes another telling and integrates itself within tradition, suggesting a kind of textual continuity to be valued by readers. The power of novels then is that they articulate the value of tradition while utilizing forms of it.

I have been suggesting in previous chapters, especially in relation to *House Made of Dawn* and *Elsie's Business*, that the value of tradition can be subverted, and it is capable of presenting its own deviant possibilities for disruptions of community and normativity. The story of "The Second Coming of the Shoyahpee" holds such possibilities. The chapter opens with a somewhat conspiratorial scenario: LaGrinder and the Stemteema "formulat[ing] and abandon[ing] different plots for separating the lovers [Cogewea and Densmore]" (217). She then proceeds to tell a story of an aunt shamed by a white man she eloped with, a story which ends in betrayal and the loss of the abandoned woman's will to live. The story is meant to illustrate why Stemteema "hate[s] the pale faced race" (217). It also serves the function of recruiting LaGrinder as a potential ally, and ultimately a suitor for Cogewea, in "separating the lovers," that is, Alfred Densmore and Cogewea. The very first disruptive aspect of this scenario is that a man serves as the audience. If oral tradition stands in as a culturally representative form for Cogewea to accept or reject, she certainly does not have the opportunity in this case to accept or reject this particular story. It becomes an element of culture used against her. The significance of men in this scenario becomes more apparent through the Stemteema's use of first-person in reciting the events of the story. She tells the story through her father, essentially

taking on the voice of a man. In fact, many of the chapters suggest that the stories stem from a male-dominated tradition. In an earlier chapter for example, when she tells the story of the "The Dead Man's Vision," the Stemteema makes it clear that the events "happened in the time of my grandfather" and they were "given to [her] by [her] father" (122). If anything, the grandmother seems to be carrying and promoting a tradition of men, certainly not convincingly a woman-centered one.

In "The Second Coming of the Shoyahpee," the father in the story gives his sister basically the same ultimatum critics impose on Cogewea: go with your white husband and "be forgotten by both your husband and people alike" or, "for [her] own good," "stay with the Okanagans" (223). Her decision to go with her husband proves tragic, obviously, and when she eventually returns home, having lost her child, she "prays only for the coming of the night we call death" (226). She dies the next year. The Stemteema's father seems to feel guilty in this scenario given that he had exercised his privilege as a man to govern the relationship. Before her death, and after attention from many Okanogan suitors, the father makes an interesting choice that seems to run counter to the purpose of telling the story in the first place. He states (and the Stemteema is voicing this): "I would not follow the old custom and give my sister against her will" (226). From this viewpoint, abandoning "custom," or, in some sense, rejecting tradition, might be valued as a valid response, yet the Stemteema herself tries to take up the role of a figure who has the authority to regulate the relationships of her woman kin. Given the context of her telling the story, she's essentially arranging a marriage, indeed, the marriage we see take place at the end of the novel. She tells LaGrinder: "Now you know why I do not want Cogewea to marry the Shoyahpee. They are all false to our race! *I want you to save my grandchild*"

(226, emphasis added). Both she and the novel go beyond the elements of tradition in forcing a conclusion that ends in Cogewea marrying a man, an ending simply not dictated by "tradition."

The slight discontinuity between plot points in the story and the novel suggest the possibility for discontinuity, some slippage between discourses that might not be speaking to each other or that do not necessarily stand in an ideal relationship to articulate each other. One strategy for exploiting such gaps is simply to suggest that critics might have been mistaken in their attempts to privilege some types of discourse over others, trying to read the novel for its dominant mode. The pressure to do so comes from the almost overwhelming mandate in Native literary studies to seek out the "affirmation of the oral tradition" (Wilson 84). The critics insist that we should look to novels for their affirmation and for their recovery work. Under threat of extinction, the oral tradition needs restoration and recovery because it "provides a theoretical and practical wellspring of language and philosophy, offering the potential for a written literature that reflects patterns of indigenous thought and oral literature" (84). Contrary to Wilson, however, if a novel like *Cogewea* is not quite convincing in its promotion of tradition, we might simply attempt to decenter discourses, refusing to participate in hierarchal approaches to language. Despite my insistence on deviation, I do want to suggest, in opposition or to the side of such decentering, that the novel does indeed allow for the "oral tradition" to emerge as a dominant discourse, it is just that it does so in unusual and unexpected ways.

One problem with the approach to the significance of the oral tradition in *Cogewea* has to do with locating it almost exclusively in the figure of the Stemteema, not

surprisingly, perhaps, given the status of such elderly figures in literature. The question becomes one involving where to locate voice and to think about who gets to speak tradition. Many critics suggest that Cogewea rejects tradition because she refutes her grandmother's prohibitions. It is peculiar, however, that critics have been so compelled to celebrate the protagonist's linguistic competence and yet make no mention of her, admittedly brief, participation in reciting it. Her taking a turn in the storytelling role seems to be an overlooked feature, but it stands as an important moment for the way it interprets the ending of the novel.

On one of their dates, Cogewea and Densmore rest on a log and watch the river. After spotting a toad, Densmore mischievously "turn[s] it over and over towards her" (159). She warns him, "Don't do that to the poor little helpless thing. Besides, it will bring a storm sure. Indians claim that if you place a frog on its back, it will cause a storm without a doubt" (159). Though she only summarizes the plot of the legend she has in mind, not engaging in a chapter-length telling, she makes it clear that she perceives the action through what she understands as an Indian frame of reference. She informs Densmore of an old legend which "tells the story of Swa-Lah-kin the 'frog woman.'" (159). Apparently part of a larger story cycle involving the sun, she explains that if "you turn the frog thus, she will look up at the sun and flirt with him as in the beginning. He hates her so badly that he will wrinkle his brow and a tempest gathers which wets the earth" (159-160). In good old villainy fashion, and as someone who rejects "tradition," Densmore picks up the toad and throws it in the stream. In defiance typical of his conversations with Cogewea, he states "it is too clear for rain today" (160).

What stands out in this instance is a peculiar gap in the criticism. Though excelling in other types of language, critics act as if she has been silent on all things authentically Indian. Here we have her engaging in a discourse that in other contexts would be so obviously "Indian," telling a story about animals and personified non-human objects. It is almost too stereotypically folkloric to ignore. It stands in contrast with the stories of the Stemteema which are often biographical and historical, though often prophetic as well. It shares with those stories similar ideas though. It involves a woman, a frog-woman, who appears to make herself sexually available to a man, the sun, who then unleashes his wrath upon her. This is a pattern we see repeated in the grandmother's stories meant to persuade her and us to reject Densmore. Cogewea and her grandmother then share similar discursive practices, at least in this very brief moment.

Even more remarkably, however, the story proves to be true. The story evidences a material reality of tradition. Cogewea spots a little cloud she claims will "unfold and spread until the heavens are covered in no time" (160). There will be rain she claims and blames Densmore for his "mischief" and for "spoil[ing] the afternoon" (160). He, of course, does not believe her and berates her for her superstitious, "Indian" beliefs. They argue about cultural differences and set up the dynamic picked up on by critics who insist that the novel is attempting to prove the viability of Native perspectives. The storm, indeed, comes and Densmore "leap[s] to his feet in amazement": "Never had the Easterner witnessed an elemental conflict of such awe-inspiring grandeur" (163). The novel provides in this particular sequence, headed up by Cogewea herself in the position of a cultural authority figure, the most visceral and literal reaction to "tradition." Such a noteworthy moment, however, escapes the attention of many critics, and its absence is

seemingly inexplicable in light of the admiration for her discursive competence. She can speak to tradition, and even allow for an opportunity to demonstrate its vitality, but readers do not listen or witness it.

The reason the "frog-woman" legend should stand as an important element of the novel is that its meaning extends beyond this particular sequence. The frog-woman makes an appearance at the very end. The novel effectively contains two endings. The first is Cogewea recovering from the abuse she suffers at the hand of Densmore, deciding that she does love Jim LaGrinder, and selecting him as his romantic partner, apparently at the urging of "the Voice" of a buffalo skull who names him as her ideal suitor (282,284). The second ending is her younger sister's. She marries the Frenchman and departs on a honeymoon trip to Europe (285). The novel then attempts to find resolution in marriage. Just before their actual marriage, however, LaGrinder and Cogewea stand together in their first official act of courtship looking at the mountains under the moonlight. The penultimate paragraph of the novel reads, "The moon, sailing over the embattled Rockies, appeared to smile down on the dusky lover, despite the ugly Swah-lah-kin [the frog-woman] clinging to his face" (284). The image is strange. Given the recitation of the story and its realization earlier in the novel, it could be that the novel or the narrator is trying to tell us something. Someone or something possibly looks down unfavorably upon this marriage. Cogewea for the first time has made herself romantically available to her long-time suitor and yet we have the image of a bad omen, the frog-woman whose flirtatiousness, whose flip-flopping, anticipates a coming nasty storm. If we follow this thread of the legend throughout the novel, the conclusion, despite ending in marriage, suggests some kind of failure.

The possibility of failure or defeat runs completely contrary to many critics' assessment of the ending. The responses range from dismissive to affirmative. The most pessimistic account comes from Owens, who argues that the novel "concludes ambiguously" because the "dilemma of the mixedblood poised between red and white worlds remains unsolved" (47, 48). "The novel ends on a note of stasis," he continues, "with nothing resolved, none of the many questions answered" (48). Less interested in the lack of resolution, but also a bit cynical, Weaver suggests that "a happy ending is manufactured to conform to the requirements of the romantic genre" (110). The "happiness" seeming to be produced here by the simple fact of marriage. Wilson concurs that "Mourning Dove ends the novel happily" and adds that the resolution runs "contrary to the Stemteema's stories, all of which end unhappily" (83). For Wilson, the ending demonstrates that "Cogewea returns to her former self with the help of the Stemteema and, especially, Jim LaGrinder" (83). This claim of a return to a former self runs parallel to claims we have seen elsewhere, especially to *House Made of Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, with the exception that the protagonist's trauma in *Cogewea* only takes place late in the novel and only for a presumably brief period of time, but still at the hands of a white antagonist who represents the problems of the outside world.

Two other critics' responses to the ending seem to be inflected by their feminist interpretive outlooks. Alanna Kathleen Brown, for example, returns to the issue of the conflict between Mourning Dove and McWhorter in constructing a vision for the novel. Brown claims that McWhorter "argued long and hard for a tragic ending" but the actual ending is "absolutely Mourning Dove's own": "She had seen the last buffalo round-up. She chose, however unconsciously, not to die, not to focus on an ending but to believe in

a beginning. Her book is filled with hope" (12-13). Again we revisit here this issue of evidence being entirely intuitive. If there is the possibility that the author fashioned the ending – the supposed triumph of the Indian heroine – unconsciously, this is a claim grounded in speculation regarding authorial intent rather than from anything from a manuscript or correspondence. Brown wants to believe, and wants us to share in the belief, that the novel rewards its heroine. Rayna Green amplifies the optimism even further. Cogewea "gets everything she really wants, and some besides, in the end – the man (Jim), the money (an unexpected inheritance), and a complete reinforcement of traditional and tribal ways" (218). Green also makes the case for the ending's distinctiveness: "A rare and triumphant ending, indeed, for 'Indian' novels or for 'women's' novels of the time; and yet the triumph is neither saccharine nor silly" (218). The opportunity to interpret *Cogewea* as pro-feminist seems to depend on the woman protagonist winning, getting what she wants in the end.

In contrast to such affirmative readings, I suggest that the novel provides routes to follow in resisting the dominance of the marriage plot. Why marriage indicates a triumph for Cogewea remains unclear, especially when we consider that Stemteema played a role in arranging it (depending on a certain interpretation of the Shoyahpee story) and that Cogewea's "love" for LaGrinder does not emerge until the last few pages of the novel and in the aftermath of a violent, traumatic encounter with Densmore. In addition, the inclusion of the "frog-woman" motif suggests that the oral tradition, as a voice in the novel, remains inconsistent in the end because it both approves and disapproves of the marriage. Nevertheless, matrimony remains a viable option for resolution because it

serves as a community-affirming act. It builds community, presumably, by offering Cogewea a secure place within the Indian world.

The novel itself, however, fails to articulate adequately Cogewea's desire for marriage. In fact, early on in the novel, she asks her sister, "What's on the range for me?" (21). In response to her sister's joking reply that she find a man, she replies, "Well, I am not yet riding in the matrimonial round-up … nor am I still-hunting for any 'maverick'" (21). Moments like these suggest the possibility that the novel does not have to end in marriage. I disagree, then, with Weaver and Green's insistence that a weakness of the novel is its adherence to the Western or frontier romance. I would say that a strength of the novel its failure to adhere to the narrative norms of a romance, which I would understand as neatly telegraphing the inevitable resolution in matrimony with the appropriate suitor. In this sense, the novel's incompetence offers resistance to the normativity of marriage as a route to community and belonging, and that attention to these slippages enhances a feminist perspective, rather than detracting from it.

Two elements of the novel create such possibilities: Cogewea's attempts at community-building and Cogewea's silence and solitude. To the first point, I suggest that the novel seeks out social configurations that do not rely on romantic, heterosexual coupling. Brown and Green seem to suggest that Cogewea has "chosen" her man in the end, as if all she really needed, and what she really wanted all along, was a good Indian man. The novel labors, however, to present a portrait of a young woman far from boy-crazy. She possesses an intense intellectual curiosity that she prioritizes over dating or seeking marriage partners. We see evidence at a few points where it is clear that her interests in intellectual matters extends beyond her time at school. Her interests even

seem to grant her a way of seeing things beyond the Flathead Reservation. In this way, I suggest that the novel's social impulses are guided by Cogewea's search for an intellectual partner, whether or not this is also a romantic one. Indeed, on an occasion when she does begin to "question herself" regarding marriage in the future, she fantasize not just about a husband, but a "husband who loved books" (137). If this desire persists to the end of the novel, it does not seem like LaGrinder seems an appropriate match because at every opportunity he seems more baffled by her attempts at conversation than any interest in pursuing them, and there is no indication whatever that he follows scholarly pursuits.

Cogewea's desire for an intellectual partner comes to the fore most strongly in the chapter entitled "Lo! The Poor 'Breed.'" In one scene she is reading a novel called *The Brand*, an actual book by Therese Broderick that takes place on the Flathead Reservation and features an Indian protagonist. Frustrated by what she reads, the narrator describes her vocal responses. She sighs. She shouts nonsense words ("Bosh!") (91). The narrator devotes at least three paragraphs devoted to Cogewea's thoughts regarding the book and the ideas that cause her anger (91-92). Densmore makes an appearance and she explicitly states her desire, "I just want to quarrel with somebody and you will do as well as any one" (92). LaGrinder also makes an appearance, and she tries to discuss with the two some kind of conclusion regarding the novel since she cannot quite "express [her] contempt for it" (93). Here we have a protagonist attempting to locate a community in which she can find the language to adequately express her feeling on intellectual, personal, and cultural matters. Finding neither Densmore nor Jim satisfactory, she burns the book at the end of the chapter: "Cogewea found solace in consigning the maligning

volumn to the kitchen stove" (96). The end of the novel-reading sequence suggests that Cogewea has to surrender her intellectual interests to others. Perhaps too didactic, cruel, or stuck in her ways, the Stemteema too fails to fill in the role of a worthy intellectual partner.

Read from the perspective of a story in which the protagonist seeks out a community or partner that would fulfill her needs and desires that exceed romantic ones, the novel's conclusion in marriage holds up failure, not triumph, as the result, at least for Cogewea anyway. In fact, she has had to give up her own intellectual integrity in order for her to win the Stemteema's approval and to find her appropriate place within the community. The novel, then, finds some resolution in silence. This stifling of voice, I would argue, Mourning Dove wants us to lament, not celebrate. On one level, critics interpret the traditional aspects of the novel as rightfully pushing her toward marriage and community. On another level, she has regrettably chosen marriage to LaGrinder and her integrity has been broken, not only by Densmore but by the Stemteema. While Densmore literally gags her when he abducts her ("that tongue of yours is now going to have a rest" he tells her in their violent encounter (265)), the Stemteema figuratively gags her through hegemonic employment of the "oral tradition."

While Cogewea experiences a silent period after her abduction and beating by Densmore, a plot point related to the narratives of trauma critics see operating in other Native novels, other possibilities for silence exist in the novel that may well allow us to think of other ways to resist the marriage plot. As with Chal of Mathews' *Sundown*, we see the protagonist valuing solitude, silence, and physicality. To the latter point, the narrator even makes reference to Cogewea's "Indian love for exciting sport" (58),

suggesting that authentic discourses of indigeneity need not reside exclusively in the realm of language. Again like her literary cousin Chal, she enjoys taking trips out alone on her horse. The experience, as I argue in the chapter on *Sundown*, is erotic. One scene describes her feeling "the hot breath of the grey at her stirrup," "the quirt hanging at her saddle bow … brought into use," and the "sting of the lash" prompting "the Bay Devil" to "forge ahead" (58). The erotics of the scene relate to animality given the intimate relationship between her and the horse, but also read as masturbatory, the quirt and stinging lash holding potential clitoral connotations. In a later scene, as she and Densmore on their way out on a horse ride, he relentlessly woos her and asks her to engage in similar speech-acts, "Tell me that you care for me!" (150). She rejects such advances: "Aw! Let up! This love makin' is hell! Let's ride!" (150). She seems to equate his talking with intercourse itself, refutes it and finds pleasure in the silence of the ride.

While not an overwhelming aspect of the novel, the solitude and silence stand in as at least a part of the range of pleasures Cogewea experiences. In the end, it would seem that the marriage and the Stemteema herself might continue to prohibit such desires as they continue to pull her into the community. This becomes a celebrated aspect in many critical approaches. I suggest that we should attend to the possible sinister sides of conformity. There are things Cogewea says and does that we have not listened to and there are elements of Stemteema's speaking that too seem to escape our attention. The Indian voice or oral tradition may indeed emerge as a dominant discourse of the novel, but it does not necessarily do so in an affirmative mode.

The irony of reception to *Cogewea* is that critics celebrate the protagonist for her voice but also find it comprised, and ultimately refuse to listen to her because there might

be a more authentic voice present. When faced with a character who does not seem to suffer from the same pathologies of competence and articulation we have seen among the cast of alienated, traumatized protagonists elsewhere, critics still construct a need for communal belonging cohering to what are imagined to be tribal norms. Indeed, Mourning Dove's novel stands as an anomaly in the set of texts discussed in the dissertation because she needs little defense in making claims about her capabilities. In fact, the novel almost seems to run backwards: the story of a protagonist who loses language and community more than she possibly gains it. I would suggest that we enforce an antagonistic kind of silence in endorsing the ending as somehow affirmative, claiming that we have restored her dignity rather than stripped it away. The triumph of tradition, in this case, the Stemteema's version of it, needs to be challenged to begin to imagine ways that elements of tradition result in failure, loss, and silence. Our protagonist seeks out a more dynamic vision of it, but does not find it, and we have not listened closely enough to Cogewea.

Epilogue: The Mockingbird Sings

> "He tried his voice and it didn't sound very good." - Hastings Shade (Teuton 195)
>
> "It is not good to take something that is not yours even if you think what you have is not as good as someone else's. Our punishment could be severe." - Hastings Shade (Teuton 196)

Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* demonstrates that even when we have a character who does, and is quite willing to, speak in dynamic (maybe even healthy) fashion, critics tend to want to hear something else. The narrative flow of the novel seems to demand a change in voice that results in the affirmation of "tradition." The endpoint of *Cogewea* seems to be dictated by some cultural norm, or set of norms, that transcends the everyday experience of speaking and silence and emerges as a kind of divine standard of voice, achievable possibly by strict adherence to the laws of identity and culture disseminated by "the Word." Almost god-like in its presence, this "authentic voice" speaks from above (or from a buffalo skull), or through its disciples, and demands conformity and threatens punishment for disobedience and deviation. The reward for faithful followers is health, wellness, and integrity, casting away negative feelings and restoring the subject to goodness. Novelists are presumed by critics to be mediators of such hopes, writing holy texts for potential readers to accept or reject as guidelines for their own lived experiences and futures. "Tradition" emerges from the stories as a righteous path to follow.

I have been suggesting that our faith is misplaced. Bestowing powers of redemption and well-being upon novels has the strong possibility of reducing rather than increasing a sense of self-worth and integrity because they present a fiction, not real life. The value of literature is not only its correspondence to lived experience, but also its deviation from it. In this slippage, the value of voice and silence is something to be

measured and considered, but not outright endorsed. Language creates inaccessibility to truth as much as a route to it. The attention to silence I have advocated for in interpreting these novels opens up the possibilities for thinking about "tradition's" ability to create failure and negative feelings. Stories do not have to provide the reader comfort in order for its value to be determined. Stories are productive and non-productive, loud and silent, safe and dangerous. Acknowledging our precarious position in accepting, rejecting, challenging, and transforming the premises of story enhances what we can take away from it. An emphasis on silence provides one route for a kind of blasphemy, a refusal to remain subservient to the necessity of "coming to voice" with all the compromise, even benefits, it might provide.

Drawing a lesson from stories I have insisted is a somewhat hazardous enterprise, and yet I find myself continually drawn to the promise of language to provide instruction. I turn briefly to a story derived from Cherokee oral tradition that itself is about voice, and also offers a less than benevolent portrait of a "traditional" mandate to speak, even in beautiful and righteous ways. In *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liar's Club*, Christopher Teuton devotes a section of the book to origin stories, here called "how and why" stories, recounted for him by a group of Cherokee elders, well-known for their storytelling and knowledge of oral tradition and culture. Told by Hastings Shade, "Why the Mockingbird Sings" tells the story of Mockingbird who finds his own voice inadequate compared to others: "He tried his voice and it didn't sound very good" (195). Mockingbird, as if compelled by literary critics, voluntarily subjects himself to a kind of diagnostic assessment, asking a small bird of a different species to "look into his mouth and throat and see if he could see anything that might be causing his voice to sound like it

did" (195). The other bird complies, and while looking around for some evidence of impairment or bodily pathology, becomes a victim of his willingness. Mockingbird "tire[s] of holding his mouth open and he close[s] his mouth and bit[es] the little bird's head off" (195). When he then "tried to sing" he finds that "he had the little bird's voice" (195). Inspired rather than disturbed by the decapitation, and seemingly finding no problem with the violent appropriation of voice, Mockingbird goes about biting birds' heads off and "swallow[ing] them," gaining their voices, until "the day the Creator came to him and asked him where he had gotten the voices that he was using" (195). Without any hesitation, Mockingbird tells him exactly what is going on and nonchalantly explains that his own voice "wasn't very good, anyway, so he was just using theirs" (196). As is imagined to be common in "folktales" featuring talking animals, the story takes a didactic turn and also fulfills the "origin" component of the story. The Creator tells Mockingbird that "from this day forward whenever he would open his mouth to sing, he could not quit until had used every voice he had stolen" (196). Shade tells us that "this is why you hear Mockingbird sing all night long … His punishment is that he can't rest until he has used every voice he has" (196). The story ends with a moral tag: "It is not good to take something that is not yours even if you think what you have is not as good as someone else's. Our punishment could be severe" (196).

The complexity of the story comes from transforming its explanatory title into a question, "Why does the Mockingbird sing?" Although explicitly labeled a "punishment," the Creator's actions here can also be interpreted as him giving the Mockingbird a unique responsibility – burdensome but also possibly serving as a source of pride – to give voice to the now voiceless. Mockingbird performs a memorial function

by singing the songs of the lost, allowing the community to hear once again the beautiful voices that otherwise may have been forgotten if Mockingbird had not been able to practice his excellent, uncanny mimicry. This aspect of the story is especially poignant given the context of its presentation: Christopher Teuton attempting to convey Cherokee oral tradition and its value by taking up as many voices as possible within the communal ethnography. The story itself is not expansive enough to give us enough clues to understand how Mockingbird feels about his "punishment," but there is at least the possibility that, in some sense, he has gotten exactly what he wants. The punitive nature of Creator's action, then, is left somewhat ambiguous. We might even admire Mockingbird for his "voice" even as it reminds us of his previous actions. The novelist, it could be, often takes up a position similar to Mockingbird in that she takes upon herself the responsibility to give voice to those who simply do not exist but who might be worth remembering and thinking about in terms of communal and individual values. On the darker side of things, we might also appreciate the powers of a novelist to thieve, mimic, and plagiarize voices not her own. Novels serve as the vehicles through which such voices could be heard.

Shifting positions, however, I see as significant the literary critic taking up the position of the Creator who "punishes" one of his progeny by forcing him to be overtaken by voices that are not his own. Mockingbird may very well find some pleasure in these voices – they were the objects of his envy, after all – but they are simply not his own. Mockingbird's dignity is partially stripped away because he, possibly, will be unable to recognize the importance or value of his own voice. Mockingbird sings all night because he has to but also because if he manages to cycle through all those voices imposed on

him he might return to his own inadequate voice, and, even beyond that, he might soothe his spirit by getting to silence itself. While he might never achieve silence he might find some hope in trying to attain it. In relation to the Creator-as-literary-critic, then, our cast of alienated, estranged protagonists find themselves in a relative position to the Mockingbird. Critics impose mellifluous voices they wish to be the central aspect of language within the novels they interpret. They hoist upon protagonists the burden of carrying voices that are not their own in order for the integrity of Indian character and culture to be maintained. In this sense, we tend to ventriloquize more than we listen. The characters at time hold inadequate voices that we do not wish to hear. In the role of the Creator, however, we might seek to give them relief from the burdens of voice unfairly hoisted on them, and restore them to silence and inarticulation. Agency and dignity can be found just as much in weak voice and silence as much as it can, or even more so, in brilliant, beautiful, and vibrant voice.

The critic's responsibility to voice when it comes to interpreting novels has to do with outlining its range of possibilities, no matter what degree we find it attached to what we have presumed to be authentic or traditional. In this way, our own emotive and intellectual responses to novels can be just as dynamic, and avoid the kind of therapeutic redemption we tend to find necessary. Abel's silence and use of language places his sense of self in an ambiguous position, and our admiration for him might stem from his supposed incompetence and resistance, no matter how willful, to communal demands. Elsie's refusing to speak to others' desires and generic expectations demonstrates the power of novels to create discomfort and foreclose resolution that would depend on making "understanding" too readily available for consumption. Chal's linguistic

inadequacies and strange erotics make the case for communal belonging to serve as an obstacle to desires rather than a bridge to them. Cogewea's turn to silence shows how novels, even when they might embrace tradition, lead to rich ironies and failures. We should let the silence stand even when it makes us uncomfortable and even when speaking seems the much better alternative. Mockingbird sings, but whither silence? Anywhere and everywhere it can and must be found.

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