Anticolonial Abstractions
Race, Labor, and Literary Form in Native American and Asian American Modernism

by

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Abstract

This dissertation studies what I describe as acts of anticolonial abstraction in fiction by Native American and Asian American authors published in the early decades of twentieth century. “Abstraction” as a key term in literary and cultural studies is strongly associated with processes and structures that cause death and harm, such as the material and discursive violence of colonialism, empire, racial capitalism, and cultures of spectacle and commodity consumption. It is also tied to the rarified aesthetics of canonical modernism, which use experiments with linguistic defamiliarization, perspective-shifting, and ellipsis to register the alienation of European subjects from the forces of modernity. Meanwhile, modern aesthetic formations like Primitivism, Orientalism, and certain strains of American regionalism, mined the arts and artifacts of colonized and subjected groups for abstract forms—the African mask, the Chinese ideogram, the Southwest textile pattern—to animate European and European American projects of cultural renewal.

In a selection of literary texts by or about indigenous people, I locate an alternative strain of modernist literary invention in which marginalized figures create abstract forms and engage in activities and styles of narration I gather under the rubric of abstraction. By distinguishing colonial practices of material and cultural extraction from the agential forms of abstraction I identify in these texts and authors, I show how they deploy abstraction in service of their own aims, including individual and group survival and impulses towards literary innovation. Far from a disembodied departure from everyday life, anticolonial abstractions in these texts assert

indigenous domesticities, crafts, and forms of agential movement and mobility as central to the story of modernism and modernity on the North American continent.

I cultivate my reading methods through a set of fields and critical approaches rarely put into dialogue, drawing from studies of Native American and Indigenous literature, regional fiction, literary modernism, and Asian American literature. I also examine the initial publication venues of each work, from Christian magazines for women and children, to modernist little magazines, to the regional university press and the middlebrow Book-of-the-Month Club. I suggest that these authors' innovations become most legible through their agential encounters with modern literary institutions, networks, and systems of value.

The introduction and first two chapters focus on acts of anticolonial abstraction in works of short fiction: a Native woman entering the "deep abstraction" of intense thought in Gertrude Bonnin's *American Indian Stories* (1921); a Northwest Coast Indian mother crafting miniature copies of a family totem pole to sell as tourist souvenirs in a 1911 story by E. Pauline Johnson; and the circulation of the so-called "Alaska widow," an image of devalued white femininity created in the wake of the northern gold rushes as reimagined the Chinese Canadian author Edith Eaton in 1909. The third chapter examines John Joseph Mathews's significant but understudied novel of Osage history, *Wah'Kon-Tah* (1932), for its textual transfer of a white reservation agent from a biographical subject to the emptied-out, modernist figure of the automaton. The coda pursues the resonances of anticolonial abstraction in the Seneca artist Marie Watt's "blanket stories" as forms that mesh modernist modularity with everyday materials. This project thus responds to Native studies scholar Philip J. Deloria's invitation to attend to figures "native to modernism": those whose practices of literary experimentation mark them as shaping the space and time of modernity.

Introduction

Reading for Abstraction in Indigenous Representation

This dissertation studies forms of narrative-based and character-based abstraction in fiction by Native American and Asian American authors published in the early decades of twentieth century. "Abstraction" as a key term in literary and cultural studies is strongly associated with processes and structures that cause death and harm, such as the material and discursive violence of colonialism, empire, racial capitalism, and cultures of spectacle and commodity consumption. It is also tied to the rarified aesthetics of "high" or canonical modernism, which use experiments with linguistic defamiliarization, perspective-shifting, and ellipsis to register the profound alienation of the anti-bourgeois European subject from the exciting but disorienting forces of modernity, like mass culture and technology-accelerated labor.

This project does not aim to recover or recuperate abstraction as a key term: it is a messy collocation of concepts, and, besides, it is arguably everywhere that representation is happening—we cannot escape it. Yet we are also surrounded by discourses suggesting that abstraction and abstract thinking are something that we (often meaning formally educated, literate people) should escape, or at least supplement with separate, more reliable, or better ways of thinking and representing, such as those centered on story, embodiment, feeling, experience, observation, direct testimony, or empirical data. That abstraction's others are so varied only points further to its messiness, especially where it melts into Enlightenment reason as a category. Connected to this Enlightenment history of reason, race sciences and structures of colonial wardship and tutelage have historically positioned abstract thought as a capacity that

marginalized people are assumed to lack. This history of intellectual subordination runs in the background of modern aesthetic formations like Primitivism, Orientalism, and certain strains of American regionalism, which mined the arts and artifacts of colonized and subjected groups for abstract forms—the African mask, the Chinese ideogram, the Southwest textile pattern—to animate European and European American projects of cultural and artistic renewal.[1]

In a selection of early twentieth-century texts by or about people indigenous to North America, I locate an alternative strain of modernist literary innovation in which characters and authorial figures exercise agency through creating abstract representations or engaging in activities and styles of narration that I gather under the rubric of abstraction. One way of putting my argument is: if abstraction is everywhere, we should recognize when indigenous people and people of color are doing it on behalf of what they regard as their own individual or group interests. Another way of putting it is that these authors' agential uses and explorations of abstraction address colonial scenarios in which abstractions are continually being made of them, especially in the form of group stereotypes as a kind of abstraction.

This use of abstraction surfaces in a diverse array of texts and authors. The introduction and first two chapters of this dissertation focus on works of short fiction: a Native woman entering the "deep abstraction" of intense thought in Gertrude Bonnin's *American Indian Stories* (1921); a Northwest Coast Indian mother carving miniature copies of a family totem pole to sell as tourist souvenirs in a 1911 story by E. Pauline Johnson; and the circulation of the so-called "Alaska widow," an image of devalued white femininity created in the wake of the northern gold

[1] My point here is not that non-indigenous or non-Asian people's interest in others' arts and aesthetics was necessarily a bad thing for those people, but that it took place in within power dynamics and imperial and colonial geographies. Elizabeth Hutchinson's study of the early twentieth-century "Indian craze" for collecting, copying, and emulating Indian art illuminates the work of thinkers like Angel DeCora, a Winnebago (Ho-Chunk) artist, educator, and member of the Native-led advocacy group the Society of the American Indian, who believed that the appetite for Indian art created opportunities for Native people and artists to be recognized as fully modern (2).

rushes as reimagined the Chinese Canadian author Edith Eaton in 1909. The third chapter considers John Joseph Mathews's significant but overlooked novel of Osage history, *Wah'Kon-Tah* (1932), the textual transfer of a white reservation agent from a biographical subject to the emptied-out modernist figure of the automaton. These character-based and authorial acts of abstraction play out in scenes of gendered and racialized domesticity; the circulation of commodity forms and figures like tourist art and tragic stories of racialized women abandoned by white men; and the depiction of the limited, but significant, venues for tribal national agency in the wake of Osage removal to the Southwest.

In the Native-authored texts I study, these acts of abstraction contest the singularity of stereotype in part by generating a plurality of types of Indians, and especially a plurality of Indian women in Bonnin's and Johnson's work. In Eaton's short story "The Alaska Widow" and Mathews's novel *Wah'Kon-Tah,* another strategy of generative abstraction arises in which much of the text is anchored in white figures who, over the course of a highly elliptical, episodic narrative, drift from center to margins—from positions of apparent primacy in the narrative to positions of lesser significance. This pattern is especially noticeable as a strategy in the case of Mathews's historical novel, which was substantially based on the journals of a former agent to the Osage, Laban J. Miles, who was a personal friend to the Mathews family and a trusted figure in Osage country. Though Eaton's and Mathews's texts diverge dramatically in genre, content, and context, they both imagine a white person—a white woman in Eaton's text and a white man in Mathews's—who is represented as advocating for indigenous people or groups on terms other than the sympathy of the typical white reformer for "the poor Indian."[2]

[2] In her social history of the Indian service, Cathleen D. Cahill notes the influence of sympathetic literary representations of Indians by white women, such as Lydia Maria Child's novel *Hobomok* (1824), on later generations of women involved in Indian reform movements (23-24). On the complexities of sympathy in relation to

My methods of reading and analysis are animated by approaches, arguments, and texts coming from fields rarely put into dialogue, from studies of American Indian literature and Indigenous literatures in Canada to Asian American literature and modernist studies. The nomenclature and demarcation for each of these fields is a tendentious thing, and perhaps more so given the authors I study. For example, speaking of Native American and Indigenous literature together captures the inclusion of the Yankton Sioux Gertrude Bonnin (1876-1938) and the Osage John Joseph Mathews (1894-1979) alongside the Mohawk writer Pauline Johnson (1861-1913), a major figure of literary and cultural celebrity in Canada and a member of the Six Nations of the Grand River, whose reserve sits within the borders of Ontario. The Six Nations of the Grand River are part of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, a group that was geographically divided in the wake of the American Revolutionary War by the creation of the U.S.-Canada border.[3] The U.S.-Canada border as a political boundary, as well as one demarcating academic fields of literary study, is especially salient for the study of Edith Eaton, who published stories on Chinese and Chinese American characters using the pen name Sui Sin Far (1865-1914). Like Johnson and Mathews, she wrote some fiction that represented mixed race characters and families that partially reflected her own (in her case, white and Chinese) family; in addition, she wrote journalism and fiction that depicted Canada-to-U.S. border crossings by Chinese migrants and published extensively in Canadian newspapers and magazines before embarking on her better-known work published in the U.S.

race, gender, and representations of Indian removal, see Naomi Greyser's work on the Trail of Tears as a cultural topos (29-60).

[3] Johnson wrote about the Iroquois more broadly but did not specifically represent the Six Nations of Grand River in her work apart from a few autobiographically inspired pieces focused on her mixed race family; that said, she also wrote poetry for and participated in a cross-border, public Confederacy celebration early in her writing career in commemoration of the Seneca leader Red Jacket. On this event and Johnson's occasional poem, see Grewe.

In both Johnson's and Eaton's cases, U.S.-based scholarship rooted in Native American and Asian American literary studies has been critiqued for overlooking perspectives from Indigenous studies in Canada and Asian Canadian literature.[4] My use of Native American and Asian American as terms in the title of this dissertation is partly a matter of convenience of framing, as well as a partial indication of where I address my attention and to what purposes. For instance, in the case of Eaton's voluminous body of work, I primarily address texts she published in the U.S. in the latter part of her career, while she was pursuing broader audiences and more lucrative venues for publication than her earlier, Canadian-centric publishing career would allow.[5]

Reading Johnson's and Eaton's representations of Northwest Coast and Alaska Natives together, furthermore, draws our attention to the historical formation of what Paul Giles has called "the global Pacific Northwest" (223)—a fin de siècle concept of region that, for the purposes of my analysis, productively invokes the U.S. and Canada as settler colonial polities actively shaping their identities as modern nations through shared strategies for assimilating indigenous populations at the outer reaches of their westward expansion through the expropriation of land, mineral resources, and material culture. Reading across Native American and Asian American literatures written in English yields a richer view of the common geographical sites and interrelated colonial and imperial tensions that infuse their respective

[4] In both Johnson's and Eaton's cases, U.S.-based scholarship rooted in Native American and Asian American literary studies has been critiqued for overlooking perspectives from Indigenous studies in Canada and Asian Canadian literature. On this topic with regard to Eaton, see Beauregard. Johnson scholars Carole Gerson and Veronica Strong-Boag have observed "a tendency by American scholars in particular to ignore Johnson's relationship with Canada and the British empire," arguing that "her life and works are best comprehended as part of Indigenous Canada's encounter with imperialism" (11, 14).

[5] See Nick Mount's *When Canadian Literature Moved to New York* (University of Toronto Press, 2005) for the significance of the U.S. as a destination for a slightly earlier generation of modern expatriate English Canadian writers, including the poet Bliss Carman and the writer of animal and adventure stories, Ernest Thompson Seton, who was a friend of Pauline Johnson and the founder of the Woodcraft Indians, a forerunner to the Boy Scouts.

traditions, histories, and thematic preoccupations from concepts of modernity, citizenship, and national (non)belonging to the negotiation of political borders and the historical formation of documented and undocumented subjects alike.[6]

Another aspect of my method deploys close attention to the initial publication venues for each of the works I study. The authors I assemble in this project wrote into cultural spaces and publication venues that bridged "high," "low," and middling arts and aesthetics at a moment when indigenous material culture and imagery were frequent objects of aesthetic recirculation and reinvention including and beyond the primitivist avant-garde, such as through cultures of exposition display, museum acquisition, and home collecting.[7] I constellate sources and texts that illuminate the initial publication venue of each work, from Christian magazines for women and children, in the case of Johnson's tales of courageous Indian motherhood; to the modernist little magazine context for Eaton's remediation of popular themes of interracial sexual relationships and women abandoned; to the regional university press publication of *Wah'Kon-Tah* and its subsequent success through the middlebrow Book-of-the-Month Club subscription service as a means of circulation. In exploring these contexts and cultures of publication, I suggest that these authors' innovations become most legible through their agential encounters with modern literary institutions and networks, from the ephemeral avant-garde little magazine to more durable middle-class taste-making institutions like the Book-of-the-Month Club.

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[6] Tiya Miles's work in *Ties That Bind* (University of California Press, 2015) on historical and literary frameworks for narrating the everyday experiences of early Afro-Cherokee families is a notable example of scholarly work around colonial subjects for whom few documents are available and methods of creative triangulation are crucial.
[7] Elizabeth Hutchinson discusses the vogue for creating displays of Indian artifacts in one's home known as "Indian corners": "Owners of Indian corners ranged from people of modest means who kept a few items on a shelf to large-scale collectors [. . .], many of whom accumulated valuable and important pieces that later became the core of museum collections across the country" (12). Incidentally, some magazines also mention the broader practice of creating themed "cozy corners" in the home, which were apparently sometimes "Oriental"-themed with cushions, drapes, and rugs of "East Indian" design; for one example, see Fanton.

This project thus responds in part to Native studies scholar Philip J. Deloria's invitation to attend to figures "native to modernism": those whose engagements with modernist themes and practices of formal experimentation marked them as responding to, participating in, and shaping the space and time of a shared modernity (*Becoming Mary Sully* 21). I also see this project as working in a long tradition of Asian American literary studies attentive to the "flexible strategies often chosen by authors and characters to navigate their political and ethical situations" that a strict binary between resistance and accommodation overlooks (Nguyen *Race and Resistance* 4). This tradition in Asian Americanist work of course has its strong counterparts in Native and Indigenous literary studies as well. This is particularly apparent in work that studies textual collaborations between Native and non-Native writers, under which umbrella *Wah'Kon-Tah* could loosely be considered, alongside better-known texts like *Black Elk Speaks*. Johnson's writing as a mixed race Iroquois woman also brings up questions of identity and the power dynamics of collaboration and remediation when it comes to the stage of her career I primarily examine, when, after retiring from her stage performance career and moving to Vancouver, she befriended the Capilanos, a prominent Squamish Nation family whose stories she retold in her collection *Legends of Vancouver* (1911).[8] While I do not focus on this biographical context, it does partly explain her turn to writing about Northwest Coast Native characters in the final years of her life. In fact, all the texts I study involve the representation of proximate others of various kinds. This includes Mathews's writing about a white agent to his own tribal nation and Eaton's writing about white characters in "The Alaska Widow" as she navigated a predominantly white

[8] Johnson first met Chief Joe Capilano (Su-á-pu-luck) in London in 1906 while she was touring as a performer and he was serving on a delegation of tribal leaders advocating for land rights in British Columbia. Their meeting and subsequent friendship is one of the most striking crossings and exchanges within what Jace Weaver has called the "Red Atlantic." For Weaver's discussion of this voyage and meeting, see 206-215. In fact, we could call this a Red Atlantic exchange that travels to Pacific Northwest sites of indigenous dwelling and storytelling.

professional world as a journalist, stenographer, and advertising copywriter, in addition to her fiction work.

These authors' representation of others also brings up the question of genre. Each of these texts inhabits the genre of regionalism in one way or another. Regionalism, like realism, is receiving fresh recognition as a modern form, rather than a retrograde aesthetic confined to depicting sleepy country towns and static ethnic enclaves, all eventually superseded by the shock of the new captured in modernist experimentalism.[9] Similar to the tourist literature it parallels, the regional narrative depicts what happens when a middle-class narrator-author figure visits a remote locale and becomes immersed as a participant-observer in the lives of the "folk." This seemingly mundane act of ethnographic-style "literary tourism" (Kaplan) has long been recognized as a mode for representing difference in American literature, and a valuable point of entry into authorship for racialized and immigrant authors (Brodhead, Foote). But the regionalist narrative of encounter—of remote, often pre-modern, otherness viewed at close, intimate range by a cosmopolitan observer—maps uneasily to its more overtly settler colonial counterpart, the narrative of the "vanishing Indian," which encourages non-Native people to consume exotic stories and images of primitive Indians in order to regret and mourn their assumed disappearance and absence from the scene of the modern. Given this uneasy structural convergence—along with narratives in which white rural people are actually portrayed as the "original" inhabitants of

[9] On "realism as modernism," see Evans. On the modernity of regionalism: June Howard has discussed the image of the railroad in Sarah Orne Jewett's writing about rural New England as an example of the modern hiding in plain sight. The presence of the railway track in the rural site shows that the region is "already criss-crossed by the tracks of translocal connection" ("Unraveling Regions" 379). Dalia Kandiyoti's study of similar sites and images in U.S. immigrant and diasporic literatures, or what she calls the "migrant site," is another key work in this vein of scholarship, which has been amplified and represented by additional works, such as Howard's *The Center of the World.*

the region—it is not surprising that scholarship on Native literature has described regionalism as a "problem" genre.[10] This critical assessment is closely related to what Kirby Brown has called the "Indian problem" in the field of New Modernist literary studies, in which more capacious understandings of modernist innovation have still tended to decenter Native and indigenous literatures, authors, and histories (290).

This dissertation joins a conversation about the formal crossings and convergences of regionalism, realism, and modernism, where narratives by and about Native and indigenous people and histories can be recognized for their complex narrative aesthetics, as well as their manifest, surface-level representations of Indian modernity. In doing so, I write in a critical tradition of Native literary studies that is interested in Native people's participation in and shaping of a singular, shared modernity, rather than the production of an alternative modernity or alternative temporality.[11] As is true of much Native literature written in English, these texts stage encounters, exchanges, and conflicts between proximate others (Native and non-Native alike) who, though their experiences of modernity are rendered uneven through the workings of state power and settler colonialism, move through and dwell in the same time and space.

In what follows, I elaborate on my understanding of abstraction for the purposes of this project; outline the approach and argument of each chapter; and expand on my reading methods arguments about the role of abstraction in indigenous representation through a brief analysis of Gertrude Bonnin's short story, "The Widespread Enigma Concerning Blue-Star Woman."

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[10] On "the problem of regionalism" in relation to Bonnin's work, see Totten. On narratives and images of Indian disappearance, see Berkhofer and O'Brien. Tol Foster's work on "relational regionalism" as a lens on the Southwest as a space of local and transnational indigenous crossings is a crucial address to this "problem of regionalism," as is works like Kandiyoti's on the "migrant site" and Emily Lutenski's work on internationalist modernisms by figures associated with the Southwest, including John Joseph Mathews and Jean Toomer.

[11] For an iteration of an alternative temporalities framing that seeks to decenter settler colonial temporality, see Rifkin. For work specifically addressed to this discussion, see Deloria's *Indians in Unexpected Places* and *Becoming Mary Sully* and Lyons's "Migrations to Modernity."

Abstraction, extraction, and expropriation

A 2012 paper by the human geographer Derek McCormack offers an illuminating instance of a disciplinary conversation about the limits of abstraction as a vehicle for representation and knowledge creation, as well as what is lost if abstraction is cast simply as the polar opposite to lived experience. When abstraction and lived experience are assumed to be opposed, abstraction appears as "a malign process of generalization and simplification through which the complexity of the world is reduced at the expense of the experience of those who live in the concrete reality of this world" (McCormack 715). In terms that are resonant with my arguments about reading for abstraction in representations of the indigenous ordinary, McCormack suggests that human geography not abandon its critique of abstraction, which has deep roots in traditions of feminist geography, but instead explore the ways in which "abstraction is a necessary way of making more, not less, of the experiential and material complexity of lived space-times" (717).

That said, in considering the most familiar forms of modernist abstraction—notably, the Primitivist use of visual forms associated with indigenous and racialized people—the use of abstraction as reductive simplification is certainly evident as an artistic method. A widely recognized example is Pablo Picasso's cubist painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), which showcases his appropriation of African masks as shocking faces for a pair of white female prostitutes. As an artistic movement and aesthetic vocabulary, European visual modernism depended on staging an encounter with a primitive Other. But this encounter, as Simon Gikandi shows in his work on the African sources for Picasso's innovations in painting, was dependent

on many layers of mediation.[12] Joseph R. Slaughter specifically elucidates within this process a double movement, "a two-fold (ethnic) cleansing performed to process artifacts for entry into modernity" (299). First, the ethnic object must be stripped down to its most basic form, removing evidence of everyday use or of individual or community particulars, a process that Slaughter names as abstraction (299).[13] In a second move he describes as "decontamination," the ethnic object must be authenticated as having been made for the ethnic community's own internal use—and ideally a magical or religious use—and not for the market or as a product of colonial encounter (299). This stamp of primitive authenticity of course elevates its value in the colonial market for genuine artifacts (298). He summarizes this sequence of extraction and resignification thus:

> [T]o become modernist, the primitive object must be rid of all signs of modernism. In other words, primitive objects had to be both abstracted and decontaminated, streamlined to their durable parts and purified of colonialism's contaminants. Abstraction simplified the object to become pure modernist form, decontamination cleared away any imperial impurities that might intimate that the object was already a modernist form. (299)

This account of how the African artifact was made available for European modernist re-invention is useful for articulating my understanding of abstraction in this project. The "aura-degrading entanglements" (Slaughter 298) with colonial cultures that European moderns assiduously scrubbed away from African material culture in their pursuit of pure art objects are

[12] Gikandi's focus is mediation by what he calls "surrogate informants"—colonial officials, missionaries, and explorers who generated the texts and theories producing a unified "idea of Africa" that European moderns adopted into their creative practices (476). Slaughter's emphasis, which is productive for my interest in abstraction, is on the discursive operations directed at the ethnic artifact itself, as well as at the people who made it.

[13] Slaughter cites the historical practice among 1920s dealers in African artifacts to physically remove features of the objects they viewed as extraneous—such as raffia weaving and leaves—as a particularly vivid illustration of the colonial abstraction of form (299). For more on this topic, see Errington 204-205.

precisely the attributes I name as producing the abstractions that I study connection to indigenous representation. Because it depicts the intentional abstraction and commodification of indigenous material culture for a Native family's economic gain, Johnson's "Hoolool of the Totem Poles" is a crucial starting point for my sequence of chapters. It features novelty rather than the antiquity typically sought by collectors, as well as the exercise of creative agency by an indigenous woman to stave off the extraction of other objects of material culture that she treasures as everyday vessels for familial intimacy and views as off-limits for market consumption.

Reading Johnson's story as a case study for the active and agential uses of abstraction by Native characters and authors also brings up a critical distinction in my project between abstraction and extraction. All the core regional sites I map across the chapters—from upper British Columbia, Alaska, and the Philippines to Osage country in the Southwest—witness the acceleration of extractive activities and industries at the turn of twentieth century, from gold mining and oil drilling, to the expropriation of indigenous material culture for the purposes of asserting settler colonial modernity through the collection and display of "primitive" artifacts.[14] By opposing the depredations of extraction to the creative and critical uses of abstraction in the texts I study—which in my view includes putting texts, images, and commodities into material and literary circulation—my project recognizes indigenous figures and writers as actively shaping and expanding the conceptual vocabularies of literary modernism.

Exploring the moments and practices I gather under the flexible rubric of abstraction in this project is a way to describe how these authors thought about Native people's relationship to modernity, which is an ordinary, everyday one that is both immersed in the moment and reflective of longer histories. Writing about the innovative, three-panel "personality prints"

[14] On the museum display of Native American material culture, see Huhndorf; on the Filipino context, See.

created by the early twentieth-century Dakota Sioux artist Mary Sully, Philip Deloria underscores that indigenous people's historical experiences of and perspectives on modernity vary just as much as people of other groups: "Some swam in it; others understood their critical distance from it; others rejected it entirely; most paid it no attention whatsoever. Because they just lived rather than self-reflectively obsessing about the category, Indian people such as Mary Sully often engaged the modern—and the aesthetics of modernism—in surprising ways" (22). Deloria's work shows that Sully's creation of the abstract "personality print" form is a sui generis form by an isolated, self-taught artist who was, at the same time, highly responsive to the everyday texture of modernity in her moment—which included twentieth-century cultures of celebrity, the aesthetic innovations of commercial advertising, and the circulation of psychological and anthropological theories of personality and culture itself. Similarly, my project shows the authors I study to be responsive to and representative of indigenous people's everyday experiences of modernity and its historical and social particularities. For instance, the story by Gertrude Bonnin I discuss later in this introduction evinces close attention to developments in late nineteenth-century federal Indian policy as having wide-ranging effects for indigenous experiences of home, belonging, and displacement, at the same time that the women depicted in the text go about their everyday lives, inhabiting many of the same vulnerabilities and moments of warm, intimate connection that they have habitually experienced before. Mathews's text is striking as a work of 1930s interwar modernism that substantially dwells on a different late nineteenth-century story of modernity: the Osage Nation's vulnerability and strength in the immediate aftermath of their removal from Kansas to the Southwest. A modernity of rupture and catastrophe, which animates much canonical European and European American modernism, only partly and unevenly relates to these scenarios, because they reflect deep histories of indigenous

displacement, adaptation, and survival in North America. My project adds to this ongoing conversation about indigenous and im/migrant modernisms specifically by reading for moments and practices of abstraction that capture modernist aesthetic innovation as a vehicle for expressing the indigenous ordinary.

Chapter outline

The first chapter dwells on the act of abstraction produced by Johnson's protagonist in transferring the design of a full-size totem pole into miniature form. My analysis of Johnson's indigenous craft modernism draws on studies of craft as a modern category of cultural production; the spectacular presence of the totem pole in North American visual culture; and the stakes of representing of Indian mothers and children in popular magazines at moment when U.S. and Canadian officials were deploying family separation as a key instrument for dealing with "the Indian problem." This chapter establishes the critical obverse of the primitivist mode of cultural extraction discussed above: Native figures actively making and re-making abstract forms for their own purposes of survival within the structures and spaces afforded within North American colonialism.

Chapter 2 attends to the figure of the "Alaska widow," a cultural type produced in the wake of the Nome gold rush of 1899, as she appears in Edith Eaton's short story of the same name. In this chapter, I argue that Eaton creates a figure of modernist repetition out of the Alaska widow as a type of devalued femininity that is serially reproduced in the wake of the social and economic upheavals produced by the gold rushes of the nineteenth century as modern geopolitical phenomena. I analyze the story in concert with popular newspaper texts that depict the women left behind by gold-prospecting husbands and lovers with varying combinations of

curiosity, condescension, and suspicion. I also put Eaton's Alaska widow in dialogue with fin de siècle texts and figures like "Madame Butterfly" and gold rush "widows" depicted by Mary Wilkins Freeman and Jack London to map the crossings of race, empire, and settler colonialism that produce the Alaska widow of Eaton's text as an abstract object for circulation in networks of storytelling, rumor, and patriarchal exchange. That Eaton's iteration of the Alaska widow is revealed to be not one woman but two—Native and non-Native—only amplifies the force of her critique of these colonial and imperial networks.

In Chapter 3, I attend to a distinctive denizen of place in the figure of the white reservation agent, Laban Miles, whose journals inspired the composition of John Joseph Mathews's first novel, *Wah'Kon-Tah.* While the agent at times speaks in his own words within the pages of the novel and appears by turns as a genuine and sincere friend to Osage tribal leaders and as "the iron hand of the conquering race," I am most interested in Mathews's representation of the agent and his labor on behalf of the Osage Nation through the modernist lens of the automaton. I argue that the reservation agent's structural position as a formal liaison mediating between the U.S. federal government and the tribal nation organizes Mathews's portrayal of the agent as a machine-like figure whose human interiority and biographical particularity is subsumed into his role in securing the U.S.'s treaty obligations to the Osage Nation. In this chapter, I demonstrate how a Native-authored text deploys the aesthetic vocabulary of late modernism to register historical of tribal national sovereignty through a non-Native figure who inhabits an insider-outsider position of political and material urgency to the Osage Nation.

I conclude the dissertation by pursuing the resonances of my arguments with writing and visual art by the Seneca artist Marie Watt. These contemporary works of literature and visual art extend the themes and questions of scale, intimacy, and the everyday cultivated in this project.

***

In the final section of this introduction, I elaborate on my methods and arguments through a brief reading of a short story by Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. I argue that Bonnin's depiction of what I describe as a plurality of types, or denizens, within a modern indigenous domestic space issues out of her play with meanings and forms of abstraction. In exploring Bonnin's generation of types, my thinking is animated by Yoon Sun Lee's work on Asian American realism, in which she interprets the representation of social reality in early Asian American texts and the concomitant address to stereotype as happening through the continual accumulation of more types and more episodes (rather than, say, infusing social reality into a single, complex psyche going through a sustained, highly complex scenario).[15] This approach to representing the real lends itself to forms and genres congenial to the accumulation of fragments, episodes, and encounters with many different characters, such as the short story cycle or the episodic novel. In Bonnin's text, I explore an indigenous version of this pattern unfolding even within the space of a single short story.

In "The Widespread Enigma Concerning Blue-Star Woman," a short story published in her 1921 collection, *American Indian Stories,* Gertrude Bonnin sketches an evocative scene around her protagonist's encounter with the narrow frameworks for tribal identity and belonging propagated by U.S. Indian policy:

[15] See Yoon Sun Lee's "Type, Totality, and the Realism of Asian American Literature" and *Modern Minority.* While it is not necessary to use Lee's work to notice the proliferation of types in the works at hand, I especially find the connection to modernist themes of accumulation, discontinuity, and repetition that she makes in *Modern Minority* to be a fruitful tool for thinking across the texts, even though not all of them feature these themes.

> In deep abstraction Blue-Star Woman prepared her morning meal. "Who am I?" had become the obsessing riddle of her life. She was no longer a young woman, being in her fifty-third year. In the eyes of the white man's law, it was required of her to give proof of her membership in the Sioux tribe. The unwritten law of heart prompted her naturally to say: "I am a being. I am Blue-Star Woman. A piece of earth is my birthright." (159)

In this moment Blue-Star Woman is contemplating the consequences of the Dawes Act of 1887. The purpose of the Dawes Act was to hasten the assimilation of American Indians by breaking up tribal landbases and tribes themselves as units of collective belonging. It instituted the process of "allotment in severalty," by which reservations were split into many small plots of land, which were then assigned (allotted) to individual heads of households ("in severalty" referring to these many multiple, or several, individual allottees). By design, many plots would remain unassigned, opening up these so-called "surplus" reservation lands for non-Native settlement. Meanwhile, Native people had to prove their eligibility to receive their single plot of land. The law established what came to be known as the "Dawes rolls," lists of those who had applied and been accepted for official membership in a given tribe in compliance with the Act. Its criteria for eligibility were many and restrictive—hence the demand that Blue-Star Woman "give proof of her membership in the Sioux tribe" visible to "the eyes of the white man's law" (159). As the story unfolds, her precarity in this respect becomes evident. She has lived on the Sioux reservation all her life, but was orphaned "at a tender age," with no memory of her parents or her parents' people. The law's enshrining of the nuclear family as the unit of belonging means that when Blue-Star Woman applies for an allotment, the "piece of earth" she views as her "birthright," the "government official" always meets her with one question: "Who are your parents?" (160).

Yet the story shows that, although she is an orphan and lives alone in a dirt-roofed log house, Blue-Star Woman exists within unofficial tribal networks of belonging that enable her survival and provide her with companionship. One friend, "who had frequently saved her from starvation," welcomes Blue-Star Woman into her house, warmly ushering her old friend into "a straight-backed chair" and giving her a share from some "grocery bundles" sitting "on the table."[16] Through this "Indian hostess" and her gift of food, Bonnin shows not only that Blue-Star Woman belongs to an indigenous community, but that this community comprises people whose middle-class habits—living in family houses equipped with tables, chairs and purchased groceries—coexist with and support those, like Blue-Star Woman, who do not have these things.

This sharing of middle-class resources as a communal good represents a subversion of the goals of the Dawes Act, which aimed in part to assimilate Indians by transforming them into individual consumers. Housed on their small individual plots, each nuclear family—and especially each Indian woman, as historian Cathleen Cahill has shown in her study of "maternalist" modes of assimilation advocated by white female reformers—was meant to devote themselves single-mindedly to the accumulation of consumer goods as an individual domestic unit (Cahill 47). In this vision of assimilation, productive labor by Indian men would fund the avid consumption of goods in the home by Indian women, while a healthy sense of competition

[16] Drawing on Bill Brown's concept of "thing theory," I see a "thing-ness" to Blue-Star Woman's encounter with material objects— "she took the straight-backed chair offered her"; the fry bread later "crowding the capacity of the frying pan"--which is to say that they subtly break the surface the narration by presenting themselves as self-contained, material things to human awareness, rather than items of use that recede into the background of the hospitable exchange that is playing out on a human-to-human level. The sense that she is not so much using the objects as objects but coming into encounter with them as active presences connects to the "Indian ordinary" that I discuss later in the context of Pauline Johnson, inspired by Kate Flint's work on this topic. Like Johnson's tourist-narrator visiting the Northwest Coast, Blue-Star Woman is a visitor in her friend's middle-class home. She is familiar with these objects as part of her friend's everyday life; at the same time, they are also not items of everyday use for herself. This may account for the note struck in Bonnin's text of the familiar-and-slightly-strange, which marks that Blue-Star Woman and her friend represent a plurality of indigenous female types just as they warmly connect and co-exist.

would encourage each to conform to modern capitalism, working hard to get the same amount of property as the next person (Cahill 47, 50). Bonnin's vision of the middle class "Indian hostess" inviting poor neighbors and friends to take food from "the table" (and not "her table") therefore constitutes a potent act of disregard for the Dawes Act and its discursive claims about who belongs in the Indian home and who deserves to benefit from the nuclear-family-based acquisition of domestic goods.

However, my primary interest here is not in the collectivist, community-based sharing of resources, but in Bonnin's representation of different Indian women relating differently to the same space—the modern Indian home.[17] I suggest that Bonnin imagines Blue-Star Woman and her friend as denizens of a modernist indigenous domesticity. I describe this representation of indigenous domesticity as modernist because it is an aesthetic response to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social shifts, developments, and circumstances structuring the historical experiences of American Indians: the Dawes Act and related projects of assimilation; the ongoing consequences of Indian removal and displacement to and within reservations; and, for Natives and non-Natives alike at this moment, manifestly uneven access to benefits of the modern economy advanced by national expansion and incorporation. I use the diachronic language of "development" and "advance" here (diachronic marking processes unfolding in linear time) in intentional combination with more synchronic, or snapshot-of-a-moment, language: for example, a shift represents a change, but it does not clearly tend in a particular direction, unlike an advance. I combine these terms in order to register the complexity of the

[17] My emphasis here also draws on later episodes in the story, which show that ideas of collectivism and kinship can be mobilized for unsavory purposes, such as when two grifters calling themselves Blue-Star Woman's "nephews" arrive. It is striking that the nurturing and lifesaving interactions that Blue-Star Woman experiences are with a woman marked as a "neighbor," "friend," and "Indian hostess," while it is Indian men claiming kinship who activate the practice of competition staged by the Dawes Act. Blue-Star Woman is no passive victim and knows that the young men are lying; she submits to their scheme for entering her onto the Dawes rolls dishonestly because she sees no other choice for retaining the small piece of land she considers her "birthright."

modern. This is not to say that times and spaces we opt to call modern are empirically more complex and therefore better, worse, or more riven with ambivalence than others.[18] Rather, I am more interested in how the language of modernism and modernity provides a flexible scaffolding to explain why one might feel this way, and how the literary works I study register the welter of complexity represented by characters' experiences of and participation in a modern scene structured by, but not reducible to, settler colonial expansion on the North American continent.

To return to Bonnin's text as a foundational case study for this project, I speak of it as creating *denizens* of a modernist indigenous domesticity for several reasons. In its simplest, everyday meaning a denizen is an inhabitant of a place: one's denizen-ness comes by way of actually being in that place (as opposed to being from that place and now living elsewhere). This emphasis on the denizen as an "indweller" (*OED*) captures Blue-Star Woman's secure sense of belonging to where she is, even if she does not have the documentation, written or oral, to convince the Dawes Commission that she is the citizen of any particular tribal nation. On this lack of oral record for Blue-Star Woman's ancestry, Bonnin writes: "The fact was events of far greater importance to the tribe than her reincarnation had passed unrecorded in books. The verbal reports of the old-time men and women of the tribe were varied, – some were actually contradictory. Blue-Star Woman was unable to find even a twig of her family tree" (160-161). As a figure of the place or the region, the denizen is not only a non-citizen, but a type: a familiar

[18] I am of course mindful of the historical weaponization of who counts as "modern" or not, while recognizing that (for example) many indigenous people and people of color have historically had their reasons and impulses to experience these perspectives, binaries, and sensations of passage and progress from one stage of social development to a next, higher stage. On this topic, see Scott Richard Lyons's "Migrations to Modernity" on the nineteenth-century Ojibwe writer Geoge Copway's composition of "the first full-length travel book by an Indian writer" (145). Based on his 1850 tour of Europe, Copway's work "considered both good and evil in his survey of industrial modernity but came out consistently promodern; after all, the helpful things it had to offer were self-evident" (Lyons "Migrations" 145, 163). Younghill Kang's modernist picaresque novel *East Goes West* (1937) offers a version of this type of travel narrative of modernity from the perspective of an early Asian American author; one of its key concerns is the Korean migrant protagonist's comparative experiences of technological imperialism in both Japan and the U.S.

surface-level representation of an ordinary kind of person or character, rather than a highly complicated individual.[19] This is odd to contemplate in connection to Bonnin's representation of Blue-Star Woman, as she has a rich interior life in addition to the quicksilver intellectual reflexes of the trickster, and she thinks of herself as an individual; I am not suggesting otherwise. Instead, my interest here is the broader social space mapped by Bonnin's text: from a simplified, wide-angle perspective, Blue-Star Woman and her middle-class friend appear on the ground of the reservation as different types of Indian woman and different ways of inhabiting modern indigenous domestic space that, as I suggest earlier, fluidly cross and co-exist without demanding, for example, that Blue-Star Woman live in a middle class home she is too poor to afford, or that her "Indian hostess" must assimilate according to the conception of the Dawes Act and refuse to share her purchased groceries with her hungry friend. They are all ordinary denizens of the Sioux reservation living in parallel; their individuality is undenied ("I am a being. I am Blue-Star Woman") and contributes to the plurality of beings and ways of living available within their home place.[20]

On my interpretation, then, the "deep abstraction" experienced by Blue-Star Woman at the start of the story issues from her puzzling and troubling encounter with something akin to the

[19] My interest in the figure of the denizen here is animated by, and not in opposition to, work on indigenous citizenship in tribal nations and the U.S., including Lucy Maddox's study of "citizen Indians" and Kiara Vigil's work in *Indigenous Intellectuals* on discourses of citizenship in the early twentieth-century reform group the Society of the American Indian. None of the core "denizens" in the texts I gather for this project have a stated tribal affiliation; this does not mean they have no relationship to concepts of political citizenship, though this topic is not my primary concern here, as I am interested in scenarios and texts in which connections to tribal nationalisms and specific tribal identities are unstated, unavailable, or attenuated in some way.

[20] To be clear, the text's depiction of a plurality of modern denizens does not amount to a utopianism of romantic collectivity or the suggestion that it is better or more authentic for Blue-Star Woman to be poor and cook outside over a fire. This critical observation is consistent with some of the forms of surface reading described by Best and Marcus; in introducing Anne Cheng's essay, "Skins, Tattoos, and Susceptibility," they point to her suggestion that "we replace the symptom, which depends on the contrast between surface and depth, with a constellation of multiple surfaces understood as concealing nothing" (9). While I likely do some excavation in my readings, it is clear that much of "Enigma" is preoccupied with Blue-Star Woman's desperate need for some measure of financial security and a stable place to live, which Bonnin situates within the competition for land and resources amongst Indian people and groups fostered by the Dawes Act.

open, pluralist framework for in-dwelling captured by the concept of the denizen, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the narrow, colonial definition of who counts as a citizen for the purposes of allotment and assimilation, which privileges a single type over the plural and the multiple. In this scenario, given Blue-Star Woman's multiple vulnerabilities (age, poverty, lack of documentation), very little action on her part is possible. Paired with her individual appetite for critical reasoning and questioning, it is not surprising, working from the logic of the story, that abstraction—here, a state of deep, immersive, interior thought—ensues for her in response to the clash of systems of value staged in the story.[21] What is perhaps more surprising is another form of abstraction that surfaces in this passage. Blue-Star Woman is making her breakfast out of her friend's gift of food; as she is immersed in her thoughts, "[a] large round cake, with long slashes in its center, was baking and crowding the capacity of the frying pan" (159). In the midst of Blue-Star Woman's mental abstraction, Bonnin composes a parallel scene of modernist visual abstraction, arranging geometric shapes in space, with the circle of the "large round cake" circumscribed by the circle of the frying pan. Less than a decade after the 1913 New York Armory Show, a foundational event in histories of modernism for introducing the vocabulary of abstract visual art to the U.S. public, Bonnin designs her own version of an avant-garde composition around her protagonist's dive into "deep abstraction" on the topic of identity, justice, and in-dwelling. Not the clean-edged geometry of cubism, the round of fry bread expanding in the pan generates a softer, organic form of visual abstraction. It grows from an indigenous woman's gift of food, given to meet an urgently embodied material need in her community.

[21] This said, Bonnin also takes aim at audience expectations by portraying an old Indian woman as immersed in abstract thought; certainly the race science of the moment took a restrictive view of who was capable of abstract thought and at what distinct levels of "civilization" such intellectual sophistication would be attained.

I suggest that the types of abstraction that we can locate in Bonnin and across the texts in this project are far from rarified, disembodied forms; instead, they are characterized by the active bridging material exigencies with forms of conceptual and aesthetic innovation. In Johnson's "Hoolool of the Totem Poles," an Indian mother's struggle against hunger and her desire to secure her child's future leads her to a striking act of creative abstraction—taking the monumental totem pole outside her home as the template for carving a series of miniature replicas for the tourist market. By creating a kind of origin story for the circulation of indigenous tourist art as a commodity, this text generates its own version of a modern indigenous domesticity for the pages for a popular U.S.-based periodical, *Mother's Magazine.*

In attending to the links between characters' experiences of colonial modernity and a text's particular mode of abstraction, I inhabit a reading method that might be described as a form of surface reading.[22] It strikes me less as method than as a form of attention to the forms of attention (and sometimes inattention) represented in the text. For example, it is in interested in abstraction as a state of immersion—Blue-Star Woman's "deep abstraction" and, in Johnson's text, the mother's eventual immersion in the labor of crafting of miniature totem poles. It is also interested in what breaks that abstracted immersion—in Bonnin's text, the arrival of grifters who call themselves kin to Blue-Star Woman, and in Johnson's "Hoolool of the Totem Poles," which I discuss in the following chapter, the arrival of the steamer full of tourists who will eagerly purchase the miniatures and secure an Indian family's ability to survive and thrive in their home.

[22] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus outline the genealogy, stakes, and some examples of work that can be described as "surface reading" in their essay, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," contrasting it with a "symptomatic reading" that subscribes to a surface/depth model of text in which the critic surfaces a hidden truth or repressed reality.

Chapter 1

E. Pauline Johnson's Indigenous Craft Modernism

Introduction

In Pauline Johnson's 1911 short story "Hoolool of the Totem Poles," a Northwest Coast Native woman finds a creative solution to the dilemma facing her family. Hoolool is a widow struggling to eke out a living for herself and her young son, whom she affectionately calls Tenas, which translates to "Youngness" in Chinook (81, 82). She is regularly approached by "greedy-eyed collectors" eager to purchase the striking totem pole that towers over the family's home on the upper coast of British Columbia (82). Despite her hunger and poverty, Hoolool refuses to sell this pole. It bears precious carvings by several generations of men in their family, and it stands "like a guardian of her welfare and the undeniable hallmark of their child's honorable ancestry and unblemished lineage" (83). At one critical moment, Hoolool allows herself to fully envision what selling the pole might secure. But she recovers her resolve when Tenas asks: "It means that I shall be a great man someday, does it not, Hoolool?" (83). The vision of thriving masculine selfhood promised by the monument exceeds any material benefits the family could derive from its sale. More threatening than hunger is the prospect that the boy should grow up with "no Totem pole to point to as a credential of being the honorable son of a long line of honorable sons" (83).

One morning, the boy tells his mother of a dream. In his dream, hundreds of tiny totem poles gather around the base of their large totem pole. He describes these tiny poles as "just baby ones you could take in your hand" and asks his mother to make him such a miniature pole "just

like our big one" (84, 85). Struck with inspiration, Hoolool resolves to make not only a miniature for her son but many more to sell. She quickly undertakes to carve the one first replica for her son to keep. By the time the next steamer arrives on the Sound a week later, she has made nine more and successfully sells them to the tourists on board. In a brief coda to the main narrative, eleven years later, a steamship officer explains to a tourist-narrator visiting the region that the son has come to support his mother as a successful carpenter, while Hoolool herself has achieved recognition as "quite the best carver of Totem Poles on the North Coast" (87).

This is a very short story, with a neat, solution-oriented arc. Of this neatness, Johnson scholars Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson write that Hoolool achieves "an unusually happy solution in which she simultaneously expresses her personal artistry, protects and communicates tribal heritage, and earns a living" (41). While I disagree that in making the miniatures Hoolool is expressing a personal impulse towards making art—she needs money for food—the story's coda does suggest that she experiences a passage over the eleven years elapsed from making the first miniatures into the status of artist. Those familiar with her regard her as "the best carver of Totem Poles," not the best carver of miniature totem poles, in the whole region.

In her study of indigenous collections and indigenous collectors, historian Michelle A. Hamilton places the story's happy resolution within a biographical framework, highlighting the economic precarity faced by Johnson's family after the death of her father, George Henry Martin Johnson. A member of the Iroquois Confederacy Council and a language interpreter on the Six Nations of Grand River reserve in Ontario, George Johnson had himself been a collector of Indian artifacts, including wampum belts purchased from the family of the deceased Onondaga wampum-keeper Chief Joe Buck (Hamilton 138). Historically used in Six Nations diplomatic

protocol and recordkeeping, wampum are composed of tubular shell beads woven into contrasting patterns of light and dark. In addition to their status as documents of tribal diplomacy, wampum are viewed by some tribal members as sacred objects (Hamilton 141).[23] After George Johnson died and Pauline turned to writing to help support her mother and siblings, she made the decision to sell artifacts from his collection, including the wampum, as an additional source of income (Hamilton 141). Telling a story in which a Native family is able to retain their material patrimony while acquiring the money they need to survive and thrive after the death of the father gestures towards an interpretation of "Hoolool" as biographical wish fulfillment (Hamilton 141).

That said, I am most interested in what is happening on the surface of this story. Simply put, this story portrays a Native woman engaging in a common Native practice: making and selling things to tourists. Pursuing this line of attention, what precisely is Hoolool making when she is making her miniature totem poles? What is she selling, including and beyond the material object? How might a tiny totem pole be distinctive as a material figure of circulation?

To answer these questions, I first provide a biographical introduction to this phase of Johnson's career, in which she was representing Northwest Coast Indians in magazine stories and later the Squamish stories collected in *Legends of Vancouver*. I then survey the diverse places of totem poles as objects in Northwest Coast Native material culture and North American visual culture, which includes the historical practice of selling miniature totem poles to tourists. Next, I outline how indigenous handicrafts fit into Johnson's ideas about representing Indian

[23] Hamilton's study emphasizes the multiplicity of meanings attributed to wampum and other instances of indigenous material culture in Ontario. According to her research, some contemporary members believe that because wampum are political documents, they could be seen as unwelcome reminders of factional divisions and disagreements among Six Nations people (140). This may explain why the sale of wampum, including the Buck family's original sale to George Johnson, was controversial: some were greatly invested in the tribe retaining the wampum, while others were quite willing to see them dispersed to museum collections and the like (Hamilton 140).

modernity and Indian women. I then delve into the act of abstraction that crafting the miniature totem poles represents in the text. I argue that Hoolool's practices of material abstraction—transferring the design of the original totem pole to a miniature craft form, and then putting the miniature craft objects into circulation via the tourist market—help constitute the scene of a domestic "Indian ordinary" in the text.[24] Johnson's strategies of representation defuse the spectacular quality typically attached to totem poles in North American visual culture in favor of representing a modern Indian family as denizens of their home place.

Routes to the Pacific Northwest and "the book-made Indian"

The works centers the late phase of Johnson's career in which she traveled to western Canada and eventually settled in Vancouver upon her retirement as a touring performer of her own poems. A 1904 tour first brought this Mohawk writer from eastern Canada to British Columbia (Keller 158). Her subsequent encounter with the Squamish Nation leader Chief Joe Capilano in London while on a transatlantic tour in 1906 sparked a friendship that was further nurtured during a summer holiday trip that Johnson took to Vancouver in 1908 (Keller 116-117). On this visit, the Capilano family hosted Johnson on the Capilano Indian reserve (X̲wemelch'stn) in northwestern Vancouver, in addition to lending her the use of a canoe to explore the area (Keller 117). These warm ties with her Coast Salish friends, in addition to her friendships with non-Native people in the area, such as her stage manager and touring partner, Walter McRaye, and with organizations for women and women journalists, all came together with the lower cost of living in western Canada to encourage Johnson to move to Vancouver when she finally retired from performing in 1909 (Keller 117). At this point, she undertook to write and publish

[24] I am inspired here by Kate Flint's work on the concept of the "ordinary Indian" emerging in late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

magazine stories at an intense pace, an enterprise of particular urgency after she was diagnosed with the breast cancer that would end her life in 1913 (Keller 127). Her friends also assisted her with compiling several book collections during her illness, including *Flint and Feather* (1912), a volume of poems, in addition to the 1911 *Legends of Vancouver*.[25]

Overall, Johnson's career spanned poetry, stage performance, fiction, and journalism, a dizzying scope summarized by Mohawk/Tuscarora poet Janet Marie Rogers as Johnson's "Do-It-Yourself approach to career building" (27). As a performer, she rose to national celebrity in Canada and was frequently billed as the nation's own "Indian poetess." Her writing is tremendously varied in genre, content, publication venue, and politics. The poetry alone encompasses subjects and styles ranging from poems of nature; erotic poems expressing female sexual desire; occasional poetry composed for civic commemorations of Haudenosaunee leaders like Red Jacket and Joseph Brant; fin de siècle aestheticism; celebrations of Canadian nationalism; as well as poetry that brings marginalized voices and perspectives into view. For instance, she often performed "A Cry from an Indian Wife," which registers the destruction wrought by colonial expansion in the west by speaking as an Indian woman who fears for the life of her warrior husband and who voices historical memory of the continent as Indian land.[26]

Johnson's prose reflects a similar diversity of messages around identity and nationalism. Her output includes pieces about canoeing and travel; adventure stories for boys, many of which were later gathered with "Hoolool" in the collection *The Shagganappi*; as well as texts that, like "A Cry from an Indian Wife," level strident anticolonial and antiracist arguments, particularly

[25] A forthcoming edition with University of Manitoba Press by Alix Shield of *Legends of Vancouver* restores Johnson's originally planned title for the work, *Legends of the Capilano,* in addition to presenting biographical research on the Capilano family and additional stories told by Mary Capilano, Chief Joe's wife and a contributor who was unacknowledged in the original text (Shield). On the significance of displacing the Capilanos in the title and centering the city of Vancouver, see Gerson and Strong-Boag *E. Pauline Johnson* xxxiii.
[26] On differing interpretations of this poem and its implied address to white audiences, see Fiamengo 102-104.

around the representation of Indian women in literature. An 1892 essay published in the *Toronto Sunday Globe*, "A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction," witheringly catalogues the stereotypes of Indian women that populate Canadian novels. Johnson points out that "the book-made Indian" girl is in nearly all cases a story of "inevitable doom" and suicide, as she betrays her family and people for love of "the young white hero," "a passion it goes without saying he does not reciprocate."[27] She argues that even if a writer is "not competent to give [the Indian girl of fiction] tribal characteristics," that is very possible for him to portray her in terms other than a long list of dehumanizing images: as " 'doglike' " or " 'crouching'" and " 'submissive'" (6). When encountering an Indian woman in print, Johnson claims, the reader does not even need to continue reading, for

> an unvarying experience tells him that this convenient personage will repeat herself with monotonous accuracy. He knows what she did and how she died in other romances by other romancers, and she will do and die likewise in his (she always does die, and one feels relieved that it is so, for she is too unhealthy and too unnatural to live). (2)

Striking here is Johnson's overt attention to the repetitive nature of stereotypes and their patterns of print circulation. This "monotonous" process of reproduction and recirculation is a pattern she mirrors in the mocking repetitions of her own prose.

From Johnson's explicit awareness of the print circulation of racialized and gendered stereotypes, I turn here to another item of popular circulation that she invokes through "Hoolool of the Totem Poles": the Northwest Coast totem pole as material object, commodity, and image.

Placing totem poles on the Northwest Coast

[27] I cite here a reprint of the essay in the journal *Canadian Literature.*

Totem poles were historically erected in the context of the potlatch—lavish feasts hosted by wealthy and powerful individuals in Northwest Coast groups in order to display and reinforce their status in their community.[28] The carvings on totem poles and other forms of Northwest Coast art typically depict images associated with the lineage of the host family, including their distinctive crest: "To the lineage that claims a particular image, crest display constitutes an account of its origin story, a validation of its social standing, and an expression of filial pride" (JG 18). Because of the hierarchical social function of potlatch, these carved objects had a different meaning to the person and family who erected it compared to the other people around them. The meaning of potlatch and the totem poles associated with them also changed over the course of the nineteenth century, particularly with the 1884 ban on potlatch instituted by the Canadian government attendant to the wide-ranging Indian Act, a rough counterpart to the Dawes Act in the U.S. for its strict definitions of who counted as an Indian in the eyes of the state for the purposes of assimilation.[29] While the potlatch ban was rarely enforced—for instance, Johnson published a 1910 story in *Boy's World* depicting the practice—it arguably shifted the historical meanings of large totem poles from intra-group social signalling to displays of group resistance to colonialism.[30] For example, the Kwakwaka'wakw of Alert Bay in fact adopted and accelerated the practice of carving and erecting large totem poles in this time period. At a moment when many other groups' pace of creating large poles had dramatically declined

[28] The most current and comprehensive reference for totem pole history and visual cultural circulation is Aldona Jonaitis and Aaron Glass's *The Totem Pole: An Intercultural History* (University of Washington Press, 2010). Subsequent citations appear as *JG.*

[29] This is a very rough comparison between U.S. and Canadian legislation around assimilation; for sustained comparison of Indian policy in these two nations, see Nichols.

[30] On Johnson's story "The Potlatch," see Fee and Nason 215.

due to the impact of disastrous population losses and conversion to Christianity, the vibrant presence of monumental poles at Alert Bay stood as a message of cultural resistance.[31]

The variety of uses for these carvings bely the apparent unity of the term "totem pole," ranging from memorials for a family member; "mortuary poles" containing the person's remains; "welcome posts" for village entrances; and "shame poles" or "ridicule poles" erected to challenge rival leaders (JG 4). While the carving of poles pre-dates indigenous contact with Europeans, their creation actually accelerated post-contact, as their use in cultivating and validating social hierarchies within Northwest Coast communities was fueled by the prosperity brought by fur trading (JG 57). Trading opportunities also pulled Northwest Coast people together into centralized villages, which in turn put pressure on individuals from different home villages to compete for status in these new, amalgamated villages and display their wealth and power through hosting potlatches and commissioning monumental markers of their status in the form of poles (JG 17, 57).

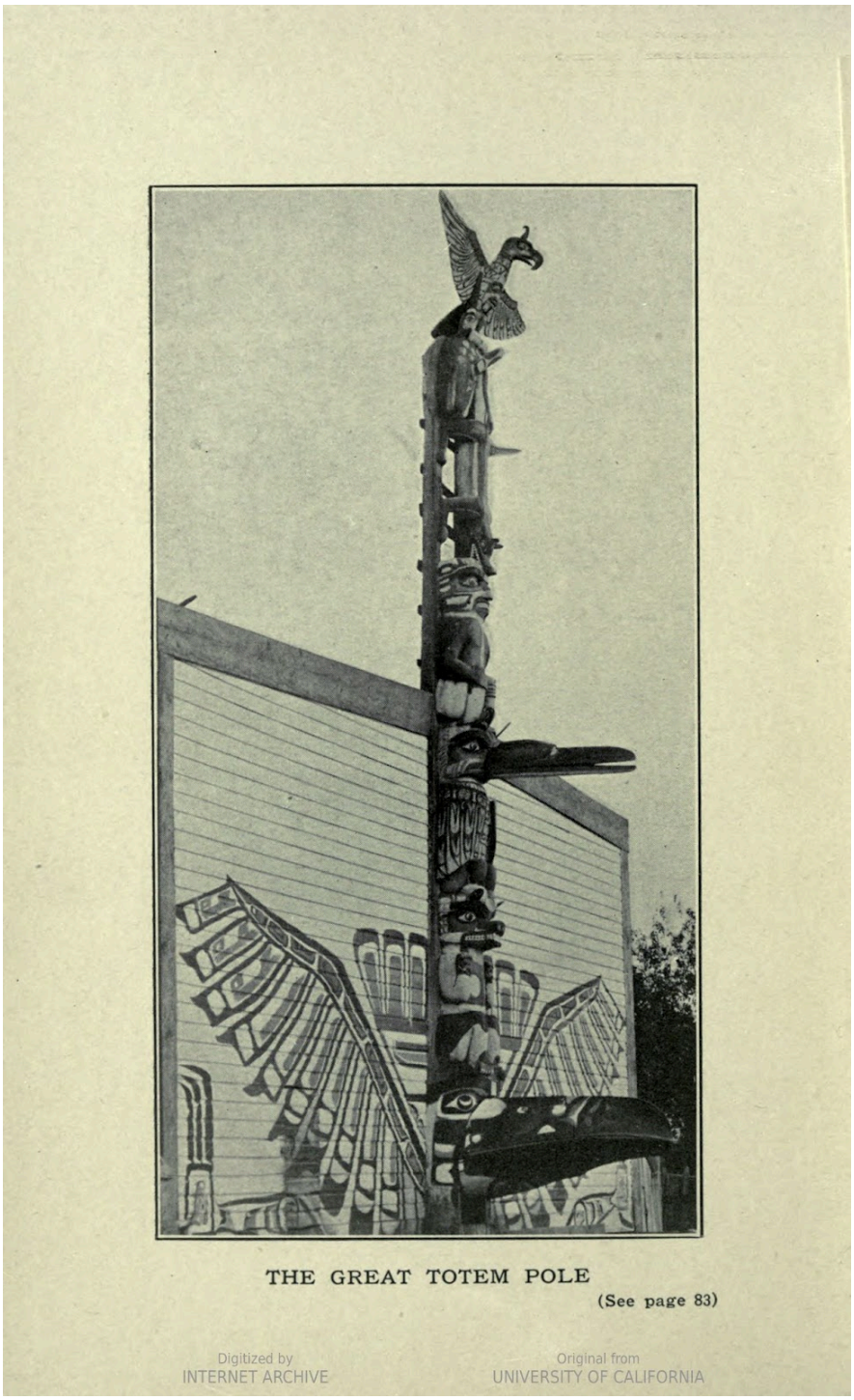
Prior to the late nineteenth century, European commentators used a range of terms to describe the large cedar carvings they observed in Northwest villages, from "heraldic columns" and "carved columns" to "posts" and "pillars" (JG 5). Among the first instances of the terms "totem pole" and "totem post" in common usage was in accounts of the Indian exhibits at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (JG 5). The moniker "totem pole" indexes a common bundle of misconceptions about these items of material culture that mistakenly reinforce associations with the primitive. The etymology of the word "totem" actually originates far from the Northwest Coast with the Anishinaabe/Ojibwe term "doodem," signifying "clan"; an Ojibwe

[31] On the presence of totem poles at Alert Bay as an expression of Kwakwa'kawakw resistance to colonialism, see Jonaitis and Glass 36-38.

doodem was sometimes marked by animal names and images but were not necessarily animals.[32] In response to eighteenth-century European theories of society, which were later popularized in modern texts like Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) and Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1918), the concept of a clan name or symbol became widely and erroneously associated with the concept of totem religion, which purported to describe "primitive" groups' religious veneration of a guardian animal, with prohibitions against killing or eating the totem animal (JG 5). But the animals represented in Northwest Coast monumental carvings and many other art objects are not objects of religious veneration in this way, nor were the carvings themselves considered sacred objects. The earlier variety of terms used by observers in fact better captures the range of carved pillars created by groups along the Northwest Coast. They included not just the dramatic, freestanding posts familiar to modern viewers, but also architectural features of a house. Some of these architectural poles were fairly short and squat interior "house posts" supporting the structure; others, sometimes called "frontal poles," were attached to the exterior of the house (JG 4).

The frontispiece image to *The Shagganappi,* the 1913 posthumous collection of Johnson's "adventure" stories for boys and children in which "Hoolool" was reprinted after its initial 1911 appearance in *Mother's Magazine*, presents an example of this latter type of pole, a flamboyant frontal pole designed for an architectural façade (see Fig. 1). My comparison of this frontispiece photograph to the many examples of poles documented in Aldona Jonaitis and Aaron Glass's extensive study, *The Totem Pole: An Intercultural History,* shows that this particular pole was known as the Wakas or Wakius pole, as it was commissioned by a wealthy

[32] On Anishinaabe doodem traditions, see Bohaker. On the European confusion between the significance of clan names and symbols with the concept of a totem animal or totem religion, see Schenck.



THE GREAT TOTEM POLE

(See page 83)

Figure 1. Frontispiece image from E. Pauline Johnson's *The Shagganappi* (1913). The reader is directed to "See page 83," which arrives in the middle of "Hoolool of the Totem Poles."

person called Wakas in the 1890s for his house in Alert Bay.[33] It is a fascinating case study for practices of changing, selling, recreating, and remediating an original totem pole. After its initial creation by Charlie James, a prominent Kwakwaka'wakw carver, another carver, Dick Price, later made the large beak seen at the base of the totem pole. The dramatic painting of raven's wings stretched across the façade of the house was a still later addition, arriving around 1900. In the 1920s, the Wakas pole was sold and transferred to Vancouver for a totem pole display in Stanley Park (incidentally, a park that Pauline Johnson had lived near and loved while she was alive, and which houses a memorial plaque to her).[34] In 1966, a relative of Wakas, Doug Cranmer, completed a restoration project on the pole; in 1986, Cranmer received another commission from the city parks department, this time to make a recreation of the pole so that the original could be transferred to the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Museum of History), which currently houses this original, as well as a copy of the Wakas house itself.

The original carver of the Wakas pole, Charlie James (Yakuglas), had a career that reflects the shifting climate of Canadian Indian policy, with some striking resonances with Johnson's protagonist's Hoolool. Enforcement of the government's 1884 ban on potlatch ceremonies reached a previously unseen intensity in 1921, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of dozens of Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch participants on 'Mimkwa̲mlis (Village Island) (Hawker xv) At this point, James turned from creating carvings for ceremonial purposes to creating models and miniatures on these patterns for the tourist market (Hawker 5-6).

[33] JG 38, presenting research by anthropologist Andrea LaForet based on a constellation of oral, written, and photographic records.

[34] This source does not explain why this totem pole was sold (JG 38). Michelle Hamilton's study of indigenous material culture in Ontario maps differing ideas of collection and stewardship; her work is therefore suggestive of the diversity of reasons people might choose to sell, including and beyond getting money, such as believing that a museum or other collection would be a good steward of objects that the person or group still claims as their own.

Miniature totem poles had been made for sale to Europeans as early as the 1840s by the Haida, who carved them out of argillite, or black slate (JG 97). By the late nineteenth century, other groups, such as the Tlingit, were producing them from carved and often painted wood (JG 98). Curio shops sprouted up along coastal port cities, from Juneau to Seattle, to sell these and other Indian-made wares (JG 99). A popular curio shop in Seattle that opened in 1899, Ye Olde Curiosity Shop, hired members of a Nuu-cha-nulth family, the Williams, who came to specialize in carving model poles (JG 99). By the 1920s, this and other curio shops had garnered so much demand for miniatures that they contracted to import cheaper ivory and bone model poles made in Japan (JG 99).

These instances of the local and global circulation of totem poles as images, artifacts, and even as objects of manufacture in a range of cross-cultural contexts mark the totem pole as an "intercultural object," in the terms of Jonaitis and Glass's wide-ranging study. In terms of my project, I would describe them as an instance of something highly abstractable and widely subject to remediation, that helps spotlight the people and groups involved in terms of their participation in modernity and modern networks of economic exchange and aesthetic recirculation. The sites of model pole-selling curio shops in these networks also tracks the formation of a greater Pacific Northwest space that is important to this chapter, as well as the following chapter on Eaton's "The Alaska Widow," which connects the Pacific Northwest to a broader transpacific.

In what follows, I return to Johnson's writing to elaborate her thinking around indigenous handicrafts more broadly in terms of what I describes as an indigenous craft modernism, before analyzing the particulars of the story around the creation of miniature totem poles in an Indian woman's home for the benefit of her family.

Elaborating an indigenous craft modernism

Amy E. Elkins has written about the "craft modernism" of H.D., a British modernist poet who also embroidered tapestries. Elkins's approach involves reading H.D.'s own artifacts and practices of material making in conjunction with her poetic use of needlework metaphors to explore European women's experiences of World War I. My approach to thinking through Johnson's indigenous craft modernism parallels Elkins's insofar as I attend to the modernity of cultural forms (e.g., the miniature, and handicrafts in general) that, like needlework, tends to be seen as inherently conservative; I also feature the agency of women in this space. My focus on the intentional commodification of indigenous material culture in a colonial context, as opposed to the interior, process-oriented images of needlework explored by Elkin's article, engages a very different set of materials, histories, and dynamics of power and oppression.

Overall, my use of craft modernism as a lens is not intended to graft something pre- or anti-modern onto modernism, but rather to show up the modernity of craft. Handicrafts tend to be associated with conservative traditions—making the same things more or less the same way, with some charming, character-giving variations due to the human presence of the maker's hand and thought, and due to their use of slightly irregular, authentic materials. But contemporary scholarship on craft as a category advances the argument that handmade crafts and industrial production are mutually constitutive terms, rather than viewing craft as a pre-existent cultural matrix from which commodified forms regrettably arise. Recognizing the modernity of craft involves recognizing the romance historically attached to it by people made anxious and exhausted by living in an age of mass reproduction. In this modern romance, craft objects offer refuge because they are not churned out by machines in factories; instead, they are carefully

made by hand. The craftsperson might have to work very hard, but there is something essential and elemental about this labor—deeply embodied, purposeful, slow—that takes maker and consumer alike out of the stream of mechanized capitalist modernity.[35]

The romance of craft is very often the romance of community.[36] The craft artisan is embedded in generations of unchanging tradition surrounding their practice, traditions passed down through family and/or occupational lineages all forming tight, intimate circles of knowledge sharing and memory-keeping. A good example of this strand of thinking is a company called Amish Furniture Factory, whose website logo features a horse pulling a buggy.[37] By centering this image of tradition and community, not to mention images of the authentic Amish-made goods themselves, on a webstore styled as a "factory," this company features craft very explicitly as a space of modern romance. Romantic ideals of craft community often branch off from here along gendered lines.[38] For men, those tight circles might tend to include guilds and master-apprentice relationships on the more formal side, as well as more informal types of generational transmission (e.g., a father-son relationship that operates something like an apprenticeship). For women in U.S.-based traditions of literature and culture, the intimate spaces of craft are amateur and domestic and associated with more horizontal forms of sociality (e.g.,

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[35] Glenn Adamson's *The Invention of Craft* is a valuable source on the cultural narratives attached to craft that collates many illuminating case studies. Adamson outlines "the narrative of craft in the period of the industrial revolution" as a "deeply satisfying" story in which careful handmaking by humble small-scale artisans resists the impersonal machinery of industry, positioning "craft as an antidote to modernity" (xv).

[36] I borrow "the romance of community" from Miranda Joseph; Joseph's work discusses more contemporary iterations of community as an ideal or thing that is assumed to exist somewhere.

[37] June Howard's discussion of a text in which Amish women act as tricksters—performing a misunderstanding of Standard English to allow tourists to keep their illusions about the baskets they are buying—prompted me to type "Amish furniture" into Google Search (*Center of the World* 167-169). To be clear, I am not suggesting that the Amish Furniture Factory's inventory is not actually handmade: I cite it as an example of common ideas about craft making and gender.

[38] Scholarship on craft has tracked such gendered divides in spaces like the Arts and Crafts movement, a movement of aesthetic reform in late nineteenth century England associated with John Ruskin's writing on art and led by the designer William Morris, among others. The Arts and Crafts movement rejected industrial manufacture and celebrated a certain type of skilled craftsman's aesthetic; these investments in turn touched on celebrating certain types of masculinity.

sewing circles) and lower-stakes, perhaps even frivolous forms of knowledge transmission (e.g., gossip).[39] The male version of the craft-based community is close to what we might call a profession, though its members could never be accused of something like acquisitive careerism: they are simply doing what they have always known and valued. Here, again, the Amish Furniture Factory is instructive. The Factory homepage states that "[t]he foundation of Amish furniture is the skill of its craftsmen. Their expertise in bringing their furniture to life comes from generations of furniture-making experience." The generational identity of a community of craftsmen confers a kind of public identity (that publicness here mediated by the worldwide web). Here, too, we see the idea of the craft object as having a special aura or "life" because it embodies a diversion from the mass-produced.

The importance of gendered communities of handmaking in Johnson's thinking about modern indigenous subjects surfaces in a series of short pieces on Mohawk silvercraft she published in the magazine *The Boy's World* in 1910.[40] These magazine pieces align with EuroAmerican practices of "playing Indian" insofar as they make knowledge about Indians available to the young white boys most often the site of these rituals of education for normative citizenship.[41] These pieces combine several elements: information about Mohawk craft practices; line drawings of designs for silver ornaments; and romantic stories of Mohawk bravery and nobility explaining the names behind the featured designs (e.g., "The Hunter's Heart," "The Brooch of Brotherhood"). In contrast to scholarly accounts of Iroquois silversmithing from this moment, such those as by Arthur Caswell Parker, an anthropologist of Seneca descent, Johnson's

[39] On queer "sideways" exchange through sewing circles and gossip in Sarah Orne Jewett and other U.S. writers, see Seitler. On gossip in regional literature, especially around the figure of the schoolteacher, see Howard 126.
[40] One piece in *The Boy's World* Mohawk silvercraft series, "The Protective Totem," is reprinted in Gerson and Strong-Boag's edited collection *E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake* (University of Toronto Press, 2002) 235-236. The full series is available in a 2004 reprint from Subway Books titled *North American Indian Silver Craft.*
[41] See Deloria, *Playing Indian.*

pieces do not touch on the histories of trade and exchange that informed Iroquois adaptation of Scottish silvercraft designs or that put silver coins into the hands of Mohawk craftsmen.[42] They instead portray the designs in terms of the meanings attached to them by Mohawk people and the images they portray, as well as describing the place of these designs in the process of a Mohawk boy learning the craft.

This type of synchronic account written in the "ethnographic present" could be said to attribute silvercraft practices to a kind of Mohawk cultural essence. What is more interesting is how Johnson's style of description presents the Native craftsperson as an active presence—a person who is creating these traditional abstract designs anew in the present moment. The silvercraft learning process, on Johnson's account, includes the creation of novel designs as a variation on the theme of recognized patterns. Johnson's putting a Native person (in this case, a boy) in the position of actively embodying and engaging this relationship with indigenous tradition speaks back to stereotypes of primitive stasis as projected by "authentic" Indian artifacts.

In contrast to these uncritical views of craft, Johnson's writing figures craft as a space for change and progress, and skilled makers as agents. If the *Boy's World* pieces feature Mohawk boys exercising creative agency in working with traditional forms, "Hoolool" makes a similar move regarding a Northwest Coast woman and the commodified form of tourist art. While Hoolool might be perceived as making a mere copy of the original pole, she is in fact synthesizing different sources to create something new—meshing the original design of the totem pole, the imaginative space opened up by her son's dream, and her deep, hard-won

[42] See Parker's "The Origins of Iroquois Silversmithing" (1910).

knowledge of what collectors desire. This approach works against the grain of the settler colonial fantasy of Indian handicraft as a static tradition.

Making, keeping, and selling the miniature

What is Hoolool making when she is making her miniature totem poles? What is she selling to tourists including and beyond the material object of the miniature? What does she keep at home? Answering these questions invites close attention to the story and to cultural analyses of the miniature as an art form, aesthetic, and commodity.

After Hoolool's son shares his dream of tiny totem poles, the action of the story steers rapidly towards its happy resolution:

> Before many hours had passed, she and the child had scoured the nearby edges of the forest for woods that were dried, seasoned, and yet solid. They had carried armfuls back to the fir shack, and the work of carving had begun. The woman sat by the fire hour after hour–the fire that burned in primitive fashion in the centre of the shack, stoveless and hearthless, its ascending smoke curling up through an aperture in the roof, its red flames flickering and fading, leaping and lighting the work that even her unaccustomed fingers developed with wonderful accuracy in miniature of the Totem Pole at the north-west corner outside. By nightfall it was completed, and by the fitful firelight Tenas painted and stained its huddled figures in the black, orange, crimson and green that tribal custom made law. The warmth of the burning cedar knots dried the paints and pigments, until their acrid fragrance filled the little room, and the child's eyelids drooped sleepily, and in a delightful happiness he once more snuggled into his blanket bed, the baby Totem Pole hugged to his little heart. But his mother sat far into the night, her busy fingers at work on

> the realization of her child's dream. She was determined to fashion his dream-flock of "young" totems which would bring to them both more of fat eating than many bands of grey geese flying southward. (106-107)

One striking aspect of this scene is how successful Hoolool is at creating the replica poles without any prior experience in wood carving. Despite her "unaccustomed fingers," she is apparently able to capture details of the original totem pole "with wonderful accuracy in miniature." Another aspect is the focus and energy that she brings to this task. Propelled forward by the prospect of "fat eating" for her family, this energy comes from Hoolool's keen awareness that money will bring them much more security than subsistence fishing and hunting (earlier in the story, her son talks about becoming a hunter to feed the family when he is older). A third element folds the previous two together, around the forms of domestic labor threading through this scene. After making the first miniature for her son, Hoolool "sat far into the night," and "left her task [of carving] only to rebuild the fire and to cover with an extra blanket the little form of her sleeping boy." By staging the labor of care and the labor of production as parallel tracks, Johnson displays the hidden underpinnings of the fantasies and stereotypes concerning miniature crafts that I explore in this section.

The making of miniatures in "Hoolool" taps into a deep well of cultural narratives surrounding the miniature as an art form. In a study of twentieth-century miniature craft artisans in Mexico, anthropologist Katrin Flechsig outlines a series of attributes and stereotypes that collectors and commentators frequently attach to miniature arts and their makers:

> Miniatures encode qualities seen as quintessentially Mexican. The legendary virtues of the Mexican artisan, considered to be inherited from pre-Hispanic ancestors, are crystallized in the miniature object. These virtues include patience, manual skill,

> ingenuity, and playfulness. That miniature making requires superb dexterity, concentration, and patience—beyond the extent justified by any monetary reward—is a commonplace in discourse about Mexican popular art. Ingenuity, resourcefulness, the ability to do much with little: these are stereotypical Mexican attributes with which we are all familiar. (19)

In other words, the miniature sustains an appealing fantasy of unalienated labor (in the mind of the collector), in which economic survival can be had through the unmediated expression of traits essential and inherent to the maker. Much of Johnson's treatment of Hoolool's labor maps onto Flechsig's cultural analysis in the Mexican context. Throughout, Hoolool makes virtue out of deprivation. She uses materials that are ready to hand just outside her home. She works in extremely modest circumstances, with no light except for a "fire that burned in primitive fashion at the centre of the shack." She exhibits patience in her preservation of the original pole and in her crafting of the miniatures throughout the night. Her ingenuity, manual dexterity, and unbroken concentration at her task— "her busy fingers at work"—propel her to artistic and economic success. Her speedy uptake of carving skills and her unerring ability to replicate the details of the original pole further imply that she is expressing some type of cultural essence rooted in the practice of carving, respect for tradition, or what "tribal custom made law," as well as an aptitude for finely detailed handiwork inherent to her Indianness.

The miniature is a site of still more narratives and associations that likewise feature elements of nostalgia and fantasy. Susan Stewart's analysis of the miniature as an aesthetic in European culture draws on the twentieth-century popularity of objects like the Victorian dollhouse to suggest that the miniature evokes "a world of arrested time" (67). Miniature objects like the dollhouse can only be viewed "from a transcendent position, a position which is always

the standpoint of present lived reality and which thereby always nostalgically distances its object" (69). That is, we always look down from above on something tiny, and this physical distance chimes with the sense that the miniature represents something other than us and our world, as it clearly does in the case of a contemporary viewer peering into a Victorian dollhouse, or an adult contemplating an object linked to European traditions of childhood. Stewart also draws connections between the miniature and the domestic. In some cases, the miniature object itself represents a domestic space, as in the dollhouse; more generally, miniatures like model trains and railroads are designed either for child's play or for adult collection and display in the home (68-69). These associations amplify the inherently nostalgic function that Stewart locates in the experience and consumption of miniature arts. Yet this nostalgic experience is less about being transported backwards in history, but rather being arrested in "an 'other' time," "the infinite time of reverie" (65). The details within a miniature entice a viewer to a rapt contemplation, a stillness that takes them outside of the everyday flow of life.

Stewart's account focuses on the experience of a "bourgeois subject" who has the funds and leisure time to consume such objects and become immersed, individualized, and interiorized through these and other experiences (xi, xii). As such, it offers a resource for describing what Hoolool might be selling to tourists.

If buying a miniature directly from a self-sustaining artisan sells a fantasy of unalienated labor and an appealing taste of cultural authenticity, then the experience of viewing the miniature totem pole itself offers still another layer of fantasy—transport to an exotic "other" time. As a text, "Hoolool" proffers additional connections to this notion of the tourist (or reader) being transported to another time and space. Consistent with tropes of regional literature, which portray the outer reaches of the nation as distant in both space and time from its modern metropolitan

centers, the geographic space in which Hoolool lives appears on a different, older timescale than that of the modern space and time inhabited by the reader. For instance, in the opening sentences, we are told that "time travels slowly north of Queen Charlotte Sound, and four years on the 'Upper Coast' drag themselves more leisurely than twelve at the mouth of the Fraser River" (101). Purchasing souvenir art—in the form of a tiny, easily transportable miniature—gives the tourist/viewer a ready point of access to their experiences of this distant, slow-paced locale. The miniature totem pole specifically, as a replica of the original, offers an additional fantasy of transport, to an experience that is more or less as viewing the original. Johnson in fact takes this fantasy of sameness a step further, in depicting the tourists' reception of the miniatures:

> On the deck of the steamer one of the ship's officers was talking to a little group of delighted tourists who were comparing their miniature purchases with the giant Totem Pole in the distance.
>
> "You *are* lucky," said the officer. "I know people who have tried for years to buy the big Pole from her, but it was always 'No' with her–just a shake of her head, and you might as well try to buy the moon. It's for that little boy of hers she's keeping it, though she could have sold it for hundreds of good dollars twenty times over." (109)

The idea that people who bought the miniatures are "lucky" indexes the economy of rarity that produces the aura of the original. Hoolool's persistent refusal to sell the original helps secure its value in this economy, and confers a secondary value on the replicas. That the miniatures are handmade in small quantities further amplifies their rarity and uniqueness as copies to be treasured. And the fact that the "delighted tourists" are reveling not in the miniatures but in "their miniature purchases" gestures towards the precise concept of what Hoolool is selling. Of course a miniature cannot be exactly the same as the original. Scaling down the original means losing a

certain amount of detail. At the same time, the details that do make it through at the smaller scale contribute to the pleasure of looking back and forth between the miniature and the original, just as the tourists are doing in this scene. Purchasing a full-sized copy of the original totem pole would likely fail to grant the same pleasure of comparison. The fascinating implication in this bit of scene-setting is that as the steamer draws away from Hoolool's home, the original totem pole is appearing to shrink with distance to the scale inhabited by its replicas. That is, the similarity between the miniature and the original will increase as the steamer draws farther and farther away, until it is the original that becomes too small for the discernment of details. The pleasure of the miniature increases the farther away the tourists and collectors get from Hoolool's home. The value of the souvenir is realized as a memory of the experience of travel.

It is here that we might consider what Hoolool keeps at home. In effect, leaving the Indian family in their place only makes the collectors' experience of the miniature more satisfying. At the same time, Hoolool's preservation of the full-sized totem pole allows her home to retain its value as a tourist destination, ensuring a reliable but not overly obtrusive customer base. Hoolool creates a miniature that appears to look to the past when it is really looking to the future.

The imagery of small things and small people recurs throughout this short text. Johnson translates Hoolool's name to "mouse" in Chinook, just as Hoolool calls her son "Tenas," which means young and small. The text also piles on a great deal of less-than-subtle parallels between the miniatures and the child himself. The boy describes the dream miniatures as "not *half* as high as I am," "just baby ones you could take in your hand," while also using his own name to help his mother picture what he wants: a totem pole that is "oh, *very* tenas." While the miniatures are scaled-down copies of the original totem pole, they are also scaled to the child himself, if not

precisely identified with him (they are like, but not the same, just as any other reproduction of an original). In these moments, Johnson's work invokes another space of modernity—the aesthetic of cute. According to Angela Sorby, nineteenth-century iterations of cute carry similar attributes with later versions of cute, such as that mapped by Sianne Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories,* but shared an intimate relationship with sentimentalism (123). Sorby reads nineteenth-century versions of textually "mediated forms of cuteness" as an emergent aesthetic that undermines, but ultimately does not compete with, sentimentalism in the work of the antebellum American author Lydia Sigourney (123). Sorby's account of nineteenth-century cute and its close relationship to sentimentalism seems most apt for discussing this slightly later text.[43] Johnson stacks on the references to cuteness when discussing the miniature that Hoolool makes for Tenas to keep, creating a very home-centric and familial affect-centric cuteness. By contrast, the miniatures for circulation are described as "miniature purchases" and are admired for their accuracy of representation, rather than for being cute and cuddly. That said, it is quite resonant to think that by circulating easily portable, child-scaled totem poles into the national domestic and home domestic spaces of non-Native tourists—perhaps for display in the home "Indian corner" or nook Elizabeth Hutchinson documents as a popular feature of homes in this period—Hoolool is able to protect the integrity of her own home and keep her child safe.

Contesting colonial maternalism

The stakes of this success are high. To tell a story in which a Native woman endures hunger and fear for the sake of not just her child's physical survival but to preserve his very

[43] Sorby writes that "in Sigourney, sentimentalism is dominant but cuteness is emergent"; this version of cute offers a prehistory for the late twentieth-century version of cute in which the cute thing is the thing that is quintessentially commodifiable (the Japanese company Sanrio's creation of Hello Kitty is a famous example) (123). There is also a relationship between visual forms of cuteness and abstraction as simplified form (again think Hello Kitty).

sense of self represents a powerful rhetorical salvo at a historical moment when white reformers were aggressively wielding child separation as a strategy for dealing with "the Indian problem." In *White Mother to a Dark Race*, historian Margaret D. Jacobs details the colonial discourses of "maternalism" that persistently constructed indigenous women as unfit for motherhood. In dealing with European immigrant women, Anglo reformers took the approach of educating them in middle-class ways; by contrast, they tended to treat Native women as uneducable (Jacobs 92). They replaced strategies of ethnic uplift, like the urban settlement house and other social services, with overtly aggressive and dehumanizing interventions that promoted child separation as an effective policy tool (Jacobs 92). This context illuminates the political stakes of "Hoolool" and other texts that Johnson published in *Mother's Magazine. Mother's* was part of a group of periodicals, including the aforementioned *Boy's World,* put out by the Illinois-based Christian publisher David Cook (Viehmann 271). It enjoyed relative popularity as a monthly publication.[44] In discussing authors whose literary politics map onto a spectrum as varied as Johnson's—for instance, she authored a poetic tribute to the Northwest Mounted Police, as well as a scathing critique of the stereotypical representation of Indian women in Canadian fiction—it can be easy to dismiss texts that appear to map onto dominant narratives and white cultural politics. This is especially true in the case of sentimental fiction and domestic fiction authored by women. Beth Piatote reminds us that "[i]n the era of sentimental fiction, writing the mother as loving and competent and hence a bearer of sentiment—or, conversely, as savage and incompetent and

[44] A 1909 trade publication lists *Mother's Magazine* as having a circulation of 300,000 subscribers—much less than the million or so subscribers for the more popular monthlies like *McCall's* or *Ladies' Home Journal,* but more than regional organs like the *Overland Monthly* (*Newspaper and Magazine Directory* 438-439).

without access to public feeling—was a political act with the power to shape policy" (*Domestic Subjects* 53).

This approach invokes white readers' familiarity with Protestant narratives of virtuous motherhood to claim a place for indigenous women and families. In this respect, "Hoolool" shares similarities with stories like "The Legend of Lillooet Falls" and "The Tenas Klootchman," which were all set in the Pacific Northwest and placed in *Mother's Magazine.* These texts portray "sentimentalized Indian mothers who embody emotional and moral ideals familiar to her white Christian audience within a context that was contemporary *and* recognizably Indian" (Viehmann 271).[45] The tests of fortitude that these women experience, from hunger to bereavement, unfold in a conventionally Christian fashion, while also appearing as corollary to their identities as Indian mothers. This approach is consistent with Johnson's own upbringing in a middle-class Anglican family where Indianness and Christianity were not seen as mutually exclusive—her white English-born mother and a Mohawk father met and married in the context of Christian missionary networks on the Six Nations of Grand River reserve.

Seen in this light, "Hoolool" is striking for the alternative it proposes to this reform agenda of "intimate colonialism" (Cahill 6). In "Manifest Domesticity," Amy Kaplan reveals how nineteenth-century discourses of white domesticity as a separate sphere from commerce and the foreign simultaneously masked and sustained processes of national expansion. Johnson, by contrast, imagines a non-assimilative domesticity that intentionally cultivates a relationship to

[45] A variety of approaches characterizes Johnson's work even within this single vein. "The Legend of Lillooet Falls" frames its story of devoted Indian motherhood in connection to mythological figures and events, whereas "The Tenas Klootchman" and "Hoolool" both portray believable human reactions to situations of extreme difficulty. In parallel to Hoolool's temptation to sell the totem pole in face of hunger, Maarda, a bereaved mother and protagonist of "The Tenas Klootchman," battles with the uncharitable hope that the sick woman she is caring for will die and leave her infant for Maarda to adopt.

the marketplace to benefit the Native family without intruding upon its intimate practices of identity affirmation. The striking moment of transformation in "Hoolool" is the spark of the idea to make the miniatures, not in the family's everyday ways of living (except to the extent that it becomes much more secure now that they have money). Using Beth Piatote's framework for tracking the "multiplication of domesticities" in Native writing of this period, the story enacts a contest between the settler national domestic (which would have the Indian woman relinquish both totem pole and child, in its most extreme manifestation) and the tribal national domestic, in which natural and cultural resources, land, and formations of society and family are protected and sustained as common goods (4). The tribal national domestic prevails in this encounter through a process of invention that takes place in the space of the intimate domestic, through the mother's caring response to the child's dream. The story is keenly focused on a mother who produces, rather than consumes. It also foregrounds the life-and-death stakes of doing so—warding off starvation and social erasure, rather than keeping her house clean and furnished. This overriding attention to indigenous "survivance," the Ojibwe author Gerald Vizenor's coinage combining survival and endurance, allows us to read the simplicity of "Hoolool" as stark and clear-eyed, rather than naïve or saccharine.

As a literary text, "Hoolool" cultivates what Amanda J. Zink calls "sovereign domesticity": "what emerges when colonized women use the conventions of sentimentality to represent, in writing, the materiality and ideology of indigenous ways of living" (18). Zink usefully outlines this process as yielding "a syncretic literary domesticity" that "melds Native traditions with Euro-American rituals" and that may include "disrupting the before/after transformation plot" of narratives of assimilation (254). We have seen how "Hoolool" disrupts the "before/after transformation plot" around household commodities that white women

reformers put forward as a script for assimilation. There are other ways in which I read Johnson as actively *crafting* the particular texture of domesticity in the story, through scenes of material making. For instance, Johnson might have written a story in which the mother systematically weighs what tourists will buy, notices pieces of wood conveniently scattered outside her home, and generates the idea to create the replicas in response to these external circumstances. Instead, the story locates Hoolool's ideas and actions in the sphere of maternal care and responsiveness to her child's needs and wants—externalities play a role but do not supply the motive. The original spark for the home-based economy of "Hoolool" is not the appetites of the market, but the child's self-expressed desire for a plaything small enough to cradle in his arms. In *Sentimental Materialism,* Lori Merish observes that "[c]omforts are essential to the emotional culture of sentimentalism: expressions of care, they are distributed to ensure that the comforted self can care in return" (122). In a situation otherwise bereft of material comforts—very different from the well-padded white middle-class scenes of sentiment that Merish analyzes—Hoolool is indeed able to provide her son with an object that serves as an expression of care and comfort first and foremost, before she carves additional replicas destined for market circulation: the boy falls asleep with the cute "baby Totem Pole hugged to his little heart." The intimate domestic of "Hoolool" is animated by these concentric circles of comfort.

Making the totem pole ordinary

In this section I pair a more sustained analysis of the conclusion of the story with historical context for the hyper-visibility of the totem pole as an icon in North American visual culture. I explore how Johnson's craft modernism contributes to de-spectacularizing the totem pole and making it an attribute of an "Indian ordinary."

The narrator of “Hoolool” surfaces as a presence only in the coda to the story, which takes place eleven years after Hoolool makes and sells her first batch of miniatures. The narrator is a passenger on a steamship who is struck by the scene she encounters as the vessel approaches shore:

> [. . .] as the steamer reached a certain landing I saw a giant Totem Pole with a well-built frame house at its base. It was standing considerably away from the shore, but its newness was apparent, for on its roof, busily engaged at shingling, was an agile Indian youth of some seventeen years.
>
> "That youngster built that house all by himself," volunteered one of the ship's officers at my elbow. "He is a born carpenter, and gets all the work he can do. He has supported his mother in comfort for two years, and he isn't full grown yet."
>
> "Who is he?" I asked, with keen interest.
>
> "His name is Tenas," replied the officer. "His mother is a splendid woman. 'Hoolool,' they call her. She is quite the best carver of Totem Poles on the North Coast." (108-109)

Here, one might imagine that what the narrator would find most striking is the spectacle of the “giant Totem Pole,” but instead it is the sight of both the “giant Totem Pole with a well-built frame house at its base” that she initially perceives. And what sustains her attention is not the elaborately carved monument but the new house and the “agile Indian youth” working on its roof. The sentimental return of care by the comforted self here, though in another departure from the white-authored literature of “sentimental materialism,” which focuses on the middle-class consumption of commodities. The return of care in “Hoolool” takes a high-stakes material form, in which the indigenous person is a producer. The son, Tenas, has been working as a carpenter,

and the "fir shack" that they used to live in has been replaced by "a well-built frame house" on which he is seen "busily engaged in shingling." An indigenous person in the act of building their family's house is a powerfully literal representation of "sovereign domesticity."

This narrative attention to the unspectacular details of an Indian life is a pattern that Kate Flint discusses in Johnson's work as part of a broader concept of "the ordinary Indian." Indians typically appear in the EuroAmerican imaginary as exotic presences that excitingly disrupt the texture of mundane modern life (Flint 189). Flint identifies a countervailing thread in late nineteenth and early twentieth century photography and literature, including Johnson's *Legends of Vancouver,* in which Indian people shaped representations of themselves or of fictional Indians to reflect "a very similar domestic quotidian to that of the (presumed) non-Native reader" or viewer (195).

Much of Johnson's fiction dwells in this space. To this end, a characteristic device that we see "Hoolool" and other texts is her use of first person-narrators. The speaking "I" of these texts exploits the productive ambiguity of Johnson's own multiple positions as an authorial figure, a mixed race Indian, and a kind of proxy for the reader. Often these first-person narrators serve as interlocutors to the Native person telling the story, listening far more than they speak. As a literary technique, framing herself as a listener and observer gives her the narrative agency to create a portrait of the person speaking and generate a context for their encounter. In "The Tenas Klootchman," one of the stories of Indian mothers that Johnson placed in *Mother's Magazine,* the narrator meets her Native interlocutor on a steamer voyage where all the passengers typically gather for a formal evening meal. The notion that a middle-class Native woman will vacation on a steamer, dress for dinner, and, at the end of the evening, have a nursemaid carry out her baby, all while the narrator takes quietly attentive but unsurprised stock

of such details, produces this sense of an Indian ordinary. Johnson's finely observant and studiously unruffled stance towards her Indian storytellers composes an ordinariness that is "not to be equated with a flattening out and with dullness, but with a call to alertness, and to the democratic implication of difference's particularities" (Flint 202). In "Hoolool," the narrator directs her alertness not just to the massive totem pole but to the everyday scene of "sovereign domesticity" unfolding before her.

This de-spectacularizing posture towards the totem pole stands in stark contrast to how totem poles and totem pole imagery circulated in North American culture, and the meanings that were attached to them by non-Native viewers. An especially instructive case study for our purposes is the Chief-of-All-Women pole, which was stolen by Seattle businessmen in 1899 from a supposedly "deserted" village in Tongass and installed with great pomp in Seattle's Pioneer Place, which marked the first European settlement in the area.[46] A fifty-foot monument of carved cedar figures, the pole was commissioned in the late eighteenth century by the family of Chief-of-All-Women, a deceased woman of the Ganaxádi Raven clan of the Tongass Tlingit (Thrush 113). This monumental carving held the woman's cremated remains and represented figures in stories associated with her family ancestry, including the raven and the kingfisher (Thrush 113). In conjunction with its mortuary and commemorative functions, the erection of the Chief-of-All-Women pole reinforced her family's social status in their community on Tongass, an island in the southern panhandle region of Alaska (Thrush 113). This history is forgotten in the installation proceedings at Pioneer Place. A speech given at the unveiling ceremony treats the totem pole as a prop within the mythology of Indians as a "vanishing race," claiming that "[i]t was erected when that race was at its best, before the swoop of the white man bewildered the

[46] The Sunset Telephone and Telegraph Company of Seattle lent its expertise and equipment to install the totem pole in Pioneer Place ("Totem Pole Stands" 2).

simplicity of its brain and palsied the cunning of its hand." Notably absent from this speech are the reasons why the creation of totem poles largely declined throughout the nineteenth century and why the people who created them might appear to have vanished or "deserted" their homes. The artistic vitality of totem pole creation and display in places like Alert Bay is also unmentioned.

The case of the Chief-of-All-Women pole is also instructive for why city officials and businesspeople saw it as in their interests to display a spectacular artifact of indigenous culture that was not originally associated with the Seattle area. Certainly it would be a draw for tourism; in the 1900s, steamship companies would begin to advertise "totem pole tours" of Alaska of the kind potentially depicted in "Hoolool" (JG 97). But officials also saw the totem pole as key to developing Seattle's identity as a modern city. Another speaker at the Pioneer Place unveiling declared: "It is eminently fitting that [the pole] should be located in Seattle, the gateway of the commerce of the north" ("Totem Pole Stands" 1). This narrative of Seattle as the "gateway to the north" reflects expansionist visions of the transpacific, including the northward view up the Pacific coast to Alaska, catalyzed by the Yukon gold rush. This expansionist vision is key to the next chapter, on Edith Eaton's "Alaska Widow." Historian Coll Thrush writes that as "a trophy of the gold rush boom, the Chief-of-All-Women pole became a symbol of Seattle's metropolitan reach, and thus its modernity" (117). This modernity depended on a visual rhetoric that dwelled on the stark contrast between the supposedly disappearing, primitive form of the totem pole and the modern brick multistory city buildings that surrounded it. Images of the Pioneer Place totem pole became a heavily reproduced item of visual culture circulating in newspaper photography, cartes de visites, and postcards (for a 1903 example of a postcard image, see Figure 2). This

imagery captured the sense of spectacle attached by EuroAmerican observers to the monument's transplantation into the heart of the metropolis.

Figure 2. A picture postcard of the Chief-of-All-Women totem pole displayed in Pioneer Square in Seattle, Washington, issued by the Detroit Publishing Company 1903-1904. Image downloaded from The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

A critical view of the non-Native collector's appetite for Indian artifacts is a theme throughout Johnson's work. In "A Red Girl's Reasoning" (1893), perhaps her most widely-known prose text, the heroine, Christie MacDonald, has married a young white man who experienced "the Indian relic-hunting craze" as a boy and who had "consummated his predilections for Indianology" through his marriage to Christie. First published in the Montreal-based literary monthly *Dominion Illustrated*, "Reasoning" merges the colonial appetite for collecting Indian artifacts with romantic and sexual desire, venturing into more heated terrain than the family-friendly fare of *Mother's Magazine.* Yet these stories share a common spine around staging Native women's agential encounters with colonial frameworks for knowing and consuming Indianness. As the title of "A Red Girl's Reasoning" suggests, the capacity for critical thought defines their agency in a historical context that denied them intellect.[47] Hoolool's craft-based acts of abstraction—works of both imaginative and embodied labor—helps secure her family's place in the landscape of an "Indian ordinary."

Conclusion

Attending to the role of abstraction in the cultivation of an Indian ordinary, or the surface texture of encounters between proximate others, that I study in each of these chapters helps us re-assess Johnson and the other writers I study, especially in relation to the charge of accommodationism or assimilation that has often been leveled against them. Certainly Johnson celebrated Canadian nationalism. And similar to Edith Eaton and John Joseph Mathews, she benefitted from a mixed race identity that helped confer the authority (or the exotic cachet) to

[47] See Montero Román on racialized women's "cognitive citizenship" in modernist literature. "A Red Girl's Reasoning" shares resonances with Edith Eaton's "The Alaska Widow" around the recognition and non-recognition of Indian marriage practices by colonial figures. The reason for Christie's break with her white husband is his aversion to the idea that her parents could be considered married if they did not have a Christian wedding ceremony.

function as a "cultural ambassadors" in writing and publishing for predominantly white and non-Native audiences during high tides of white nativism and U.S. and Canadian expansionism.[48] But these authors' relative success in these venues, particularly in the case of Johnson and Eaton as unmarried professional women tasked with supporting their families of origin, has as much to do with their canny, creativity, and persistence in writing and submitting to a wide range of publications in a variety of genres and content areas, including fields and topoi that have historically been devalorized for their association with women, children, and the home.

For Johnson, writing in venues animated by vocabularies of sentiment and domesticity did not mean automatically adhering to a single EuroAmerican cultural script, first, because this language encompasses its own multiplicity and points of ambivalence begin with; second, because she represents alternative forms of domesticity, that, similar to Flint's concept of the "ordinary Indian" or Piatote's "intimate domestic," attend to the texture of a particular Indian home and family. This texture only becomes perceptible, according to a striking image by Gertrude Bonnin, "as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears bent with compassion to hear it."[49] Johnson's Indian ordinary speaks in this "low voice" to counter the culture of spectacle surrounding the totem pole and the discourses of otherness typically attached to Indian women. Rather than treating them as exotic figures, "curiously colored," Johnson's narrators encounter Indian women in the space of overlapping, shared quotidians woven together through modern networks of mobility and exchange.

[48] Elaine Kim's discussion of many early Asian American writers as "cultural ambassadors" frames them negatively as people who achieved "success through acquiescence" (72). I suggest here that it is important to read texts that are not necessarily overtly resistant in the mode of "A Red Girl's Reasoning" as something other than acquiescent.
[49] This image comes from Bonnin's autobiographical writing on her residential school experience in "School Days of an Indian Girl," which was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900 (27). See Fetterley and Pryse 376-381 on the theme of listening ears and empathy in the regionalist writing of Gertrude Bonnin and Sarah Orne Jewett.

Chapter 2

“She is real and a widow, but not both”: Gender, Race, and Gold Rush Modernity in Edith Eaton's "The Alaska Widow"

In Edith Maude Eaton's 1909 short story “The Alaska Widow,” an Alaska Native woman makes a startling appearance at the wedding of a young white man to a young white woman. The white man, Frank Beale, has just returned to his home city of Seattle from a year-long venture into Alaska implied to be connected to the 1897 Klondike gold rush. Poor when he left Seattle, Beale has now made enough money to marry his fiancée, a seventeen-year-old girl named Nora Leslie. Nora has been waiting patiently for him, “bright and true and prettier than ever,” during the full period of his absence. But just as the couple has been joined in marriage, “in walked an Indian girl with an infant in her arms” (493). This sudden entrance quickly leads to the revelation that she, the Indian girl, is in a sexual and romantic relationship with the groom, and that the baby she is holding is his. The white woman, Nora, reacts to this news just as quickly: “The outcome was that Nora refused to live with Beale; but she made no fuss, simply stated what she would do and what she would not do and requested Beale to marry the young Indian [. . . .] as soon as a divorce could be got” (493-494). The clergyman and some of the guests protest, but Nora refuses to retreat, and Beale eventually submits. He promises to legally marry the Indian woman and embarks for Nome with her and the child that very same day, as, meanwhile, Nora quickly files for divorce (494).

In addition to a startling moment in the story of “The Alaska Widow,” the arrival of this unnamed “Indian girl” and her child at a white family wedding represents a startling entry within

the literary history of Asian America. Eaton, who frequently published under the Chinese pen name Sui Sin Far, has long stood as a "foremother" to and a canonical figure in the creation of Asian American and Asian Canadian literatures as fields of study. Sui Sin Far is best known for her stories of Chinese and Chinese American characters, which craft sympathetic portrayals of Asian racialized families, including mixed race families, at a moment when gendered and sexualized regimes of Asian exclusion were ascendant in North America. Literary scholar Mary Chapman's discovery of "The Alaska Widow" and her work to bring this previously unknown story to twenty-first century print in the journal *MELUS* in 2013 has therefore transformed our shared understanding of this early Asian North American author by recovering a text populated almost entirely with white Americans, in addition to the Alaskan Indian woman and the mixed race infant.[50] Subsequent work by Chapman and additional collaborators has recovered further instances of non-Chinese figures and communities featuring in Eaton's work. The most visibly multicultural slice of her oeuvre is her magazines stories for children, spanning characters, groups, and stories marked as Japanese, Persian, Indian (from India), and "Arabian" (Chapman "Introduction," lix). Meanwhile, her journalism brought her to locales as diverse as northern Ontario and Jamaica; in addition to the Montreal-based work of her early career (Chapman "Introduction," xxxiii). Each of these postings embedded her in distinct contact zones of British empire, while her use of anonymous and pseudonymous bylines (for example, she posted stories from Jamaica as the "Canadian Firefly") offered new vocabularies for authorial self-fashioning that filtered into her fiction and autobiographical writing.[51]

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[50] Chapman recounts how she found "The Alaska Widow" in 2006 in her introduction to *Becoming Sui Sin Far* (xx), which collects many of these non-Chinese-centric texts, as well as new figures of Chinese American agency and mobility. Notable among these are the transcontinental rail travel stories Eaton published in the *Los Angeles Express* as the observations of a Chinese American immigrant merchant called Wing Sing.

[51] Chapman connects Eaton's journalistic personae—such as when she covered a murder case in Jamaica—to the practices of "stunt-girl" journalists like Nellie Bly (Elizabeth Cochrane), who highlighted their adventurous forays into spaces and stories not typically associated with or open to middle-class women.

Here, I am less focused on re-evaluating Edith Eaton/Sui Sin Far, though I contribute to this conversation by virtue of my analysis. Rather, I am most interested in delving into the figure of the Alaska widow herself—who, as the story reveals, turns out not to be a single woman but instead two. As one character explains to another early in the story, an Alaska widow is "a woman whose husband is not dead, but in Alaska." Both the Native and the non-Native women at the core of the story, the unnamed Indian girl and the named Nora Leslie, both inhabit the role of the Alaska widow at various points by the same white man, Beale. The Indian woman is the Alaska widow when Beale goes home to Seattle to marry Nora; Nora is a more conventional Alaska widow in the terms of the story when Beale leaves with the Indian woman and child for Nome. These moments of departure, abandonment, and rejection expose the two women's differing and highly contingent points of access to forms of agency mediated through their racial and gender locations. This attention to transient and uneven—but still potent—forms of agency is further amplified by the fractured, episodic form of the text. Through a complex and often confusing series of frame narratives and storytellers, the text bounces among sites in Seattle, Alaska, rural Washington state, and Luzon, the largest island in the Philippines, and the seat of governmental and military authority during the U.S. occupation of the archipelago nation. This transnational web of relations is mapped by the different wings of U.S. empire the story engages.

My argument in this chapter is that Eaton's core practice of abstraction in this text is to mobilize the cultural topos of the Alaska widow as a modular figure of devalued femininity tracking global shifts in economic opportunity for men. I explore popular sources for the cultural history of the gold rush widow as a type to show that the California widow (1849) is much the same as a Klondike widow (1897) is much the same as an Alaska widow (1899). Eaton takes this already abstract figure and multiplies it across her text through the circulation and remediation of

stories and rumors, as well as the splitting of the Alaska widow into both the white woman and the Indian woman.

This chapter first outlines existing readings of "The Alaska Widow" and then continues elaborating the form of the story as sketched above, positioning its formal attributes and its quasi-allegorical critique of empire with respect to its publication context in the New York City-based "little magazine" *The Bohemian*. Next, I examine a selection of intertexts, from John Luther Long's "Madame Butterfly" to newspaper and magazine pieces that illustrate the broader anxieties and ambiguities captured in the cultural figure of the Alaska widow. I show that the Alaska widow is but one iteration in a historical chain of gold rush widows—white women left behind by fortune- and class-mobility-seeking husbands and lovers—that dates at least back to the "California widow" created by the 1850s gold rushes in the continental west.[52] Finally, I will briefly contrast Eaton's creative re-imagining of the gold rush widow in relation to indigeneity with one of Jack London's popular "Northland" stories, "The Great Interrogation" (1901), where a white woman journeys to Alaska and attempts to separate her former lover from an Indian woman with whom he has entered an informal marriage. This comparison provides strong intertextual evidence that Eaton intentionally crafted "The Alaska Widow" to imagine an Indian woman who was something other than completely passive and voiceless and to represent, against the prevailing discourses of white benevolent reform, an encounter between white and indigenous womanhood on grounds other than maternalist sympathy.[53]

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[52] In addition to military wives, other ancestors and analogues to the gold rush widow include the seafarer's wife. A dissertation by Meaghan M. Fritz includes a chapter on literature related to the wives of nineteenth-century American whalers and the ambiguous status of what Fritz calls the "widow-wife" in her community and American culture at large (203-232).

[53] On voicelessness in the text: Eaton's "Indian girl" is not heard to speak in the text. Moreover, she is strongly aligned with Nora as a woman who becomes the object of rumor and contempt among the white communities depicted as someone who is unworthy of marriage and other forms of peri-domestic social engagement (being suited to teach in a small country school, in Nora's case). However, we will see that her stated wishes with regard to "the white man's legal formality" of marriage are conveyed by storytellers later in the text. I am here reminded of Viet

Unfolding "The Alaska Widow"

On one level, Eaton's "The Alaska Widow" is a simple story of love, betrayal, and forgiveness. Yet it presents itself through a series of complicated frame narratives which mirror the complex transnational tangle of relations it presents and the partial truths and misunderstandings which animate its plot.

The first and outermost frame narrative of the story concerns a tentative romance that develops between the now-divorced Nora Leslie and a second young man named Howard Crathern. Nora works as a stenographer in the same firm where Crathern is a lawyer. Crathern is on the verge of accepting a government post in the Philippines. One evening, he is on his way to meet Nora when another female stenographer asks him if he is aware that Nora is an Alaska widow. Startled at the idea that Nora is married, Crathern expresses confusion since he knows that "She is Miss Leslie!" (492). The other stenographer explains that Nora "was allowed by the court to resume her maiden name" after having been divorced; from there, the woman launches into the "queer story" of Nora's first marriage to Beale (492). This second stenographer, however, is either uninformed or unfaithful to the original story, producing an incomplete transcription of the truth. All Crathern learns is that in the space of a mere two days, Nora married and then filed for divorce "on the grounds of desertion," and that on the very day of their wedding, her first husband had "sailed to Nome City alone" (492). The woman telling this version of the story strongly insinuates that Nora was to blame for the break, having committed

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Thanh Nguyen's point that, referencing Ben Tran's work on "literary dubbing," that even though a person or group is not heard to speak, that does not mean they are voiceless ("Dislocation" 429). This theme connects to the "stenographic agency" Chapman locates among Chinese American women in Eaton's later work, where acts of transcription and listening lead to these women voicing their own stories; as well as traditions of scholarship on the literatures and histories of marginalized groups writ large, wherein silences and ellipses in texts and archives are said to speak.

some sexual impropriety that came to light after the wedding. The next day, Crathern goes to the Seattle courthouse "and searched the records," presumably to confirm the stenographer's account of Nora's precipitous divorce (492). Having thereby fed his suspicions about Nora Leslie's reputation, he accepts the job offer and departs for the Philippines.

The narrative resumes seven years later, when Crathern has risen to the office of governor of Luzon. One of his subordinates, the captain of a military unit, shares that one of his unit soldiers has just died in the hospital. This soldier, revealed to be Nora Leslie's former husband Frank Beale, has asked his captain to convey a confession to Nora. Howard realizes that this is the same woman he had fallen in love with back in Seattle seven years ago and asks to hear the story.

Beale's account, filtered through the army captain's report of it to Crathern, reveals the truth of what happened on his and Nora's wedding day and the circumstances of their divorce—that it was Beale, and not Nora, who had been unfaithful, and that he had been "the faithless" party towards both the Indian woman and the white (493). What Beale wishes to the captain to tell Nora, however, is this—that he never legally married the Alaskan Indian woman:

> To the Indian girl, the white man's legal formality seemed unnecessary. He continued kind, and cared for her—so he said—until life's end. Showed me [the captain] a picture of the kid, which he took himself before the war fever took the place of gold. It's for Nora, with the explanation, Perhaps it will help to make it plain. He described the girl that sent him away from her as an affectionate, romantic little soul, too young at the time of their marriage to know a woman's love. (494)

There are some matters about which this passage can "make it plain," though they are relatively few. Certainly we know that the Alaskan woman has died. While she lived, she did not wish to

enter into the kind of marriage, “the white man’s legal formality,” that Nora had asked Beale to agree to. It is also clear that Beale maintains a dismissive attitude towards Nora at the same time that he attests to her sexual innocence—that she was “too young at the time of their marriage to know a woman’s love”—and thereby her acceptability as future marriage partner for Crathern. The odd phrasing that Beale “continued kind” towards the Alaskan Indian, who is framed, like Nora, as a “girl” rather than a woman, also invites scrutiny: it’s hard to understand how he can “continu[e] kind” if he abandoned her in the first place. If she died young, what did his benevolence actually accomplish? And what is the fate of the likewise unnamed “kid,” of whom an undescribed photograph is the only known trace?

This more extended, though still incomplete, gloss of the unfolding plot of “The Alaska Widow” shows how it evokes the fervid atmosphere of transpacific empire-building at the turn of the twentieth century as, in Eaton’s words, “the war fever took the place of the gold,” and older traditions of extractive colonialism fed into modern, technology-mediated forms. These enabled developments like the faster transport of military troops, the use of photography as a device of imperial knowledge production, and the broader circulation of cultural narratives about U.S. benevolence and the pliant readiness of subject populations for tutelage and assimilation into the national domestic. Mary Chapman’s interpretive work on the story emphasizes these themes in relation to her parallel work on Eaton’s biography. She reads the story in part as an allegory of “the sins of empire” that “cognitively maps a transpacific trading network” that not only binds the Pacific destinations of the story but a broader global network reflecting the intimacies of British empire that knit the Eaton family together (“Affinities” 161).

As a newly recovered text, “The Alaska Widow" is just beginning to attract scholarly conversation. A dissertation by Hilary Branman connects the story to a 1906 newspaper piece

reprinted in an Alaskan newspaper and attributed to the Seattle Sunday Times called "Who is the Alaska Widow?" (cxvii-cxviii).[54] This light, humorous treatment of the gold rush widow unfolds in a see-sawing question-and-answer format:

> Who is the widow whose husband is neither dead nor divorced?
>
> She is the Alaska widow.
>
> She is not a real widow, then?
>
> No: she is real and a widow, but not both.
>
> Is she happy?
>
> Sometimes; but she dares not be too happy or people will talk about her.
>
> Where is her husband?
>
> Her husband is in Alaska.

This Alaska widow's happy autonomy, Branman suggests, connects her to other figures of the "New Woman" in Eaton's writing.[55] Certainly the Alaska widow is dramatically more circumscribed than other figures of agential femininity in this time period, as her semi-autonomous status is dependent on her husband or lover's absence, which she does not know will be temporary or permanent (if he dies, or chooses not to return to her). Her status as either married or not-yet-married also invokes the legal and cultural force of coverture, in which a

[54] Another related text Branman cites is a 1912 poem by Alice Harriman called "An Alaska Widow" (cxviii). This text postdates "The Alaska Widow" by three years; it is further evidence for the resilience of this type of figure in the U.S. cultural imagination. Branman's discussion of Eaton's text is valuable for revealing its interest in the "contradictions inherent in the nation's investment in maintaining and naturalizing binary oppositions between the American and 'the other'" (cxix). In part because my own reading of the text is filtered through the dramatic foil of the Jack London intertext I analyze in the final section (as well as some lenses calibrated through Native literary studies), I arrive at a more politically sanguine version of "The Alaska Widow" than Branman.

[55] Later in this chapter, I discuss the Alaska widow in connection to earlier "widows" of the California and Australian gold rushes. The construction of this figurative widow through major global geopolitical and regional shifts like those occasioned by gold rushes ties it to another, later, and dramatically more liberated global figure of femininity, the twentieth century Modern Girl. On the Modern Girl as a global figure, see the edited collection *The Modern Girl Around the World* (ed. Weinbaum, Duke UP, 2008).

married woman's legal personhood was subsumed into her husband's, and which, by the 1890s, had only begun to see erosion in U.S. law.

The light tone of this newspaper piece strongly contrasts with the generally serious tenor of Eaton's text. But it does invoke, in the suggestion that the Alaska widow "dares not to be too happy or people will talk about her," the danger of incurring suspicion about one's sexual reputation, a risk that reaches full, damaging force in Nora Leslie's experience of the Alaska widow's precarious liminality. The recirculation of this piece, "Who is the Alaska Widow?", from an Alaskan newspaper to a Seattle one prefigures the regional circulation of rumor, speculation, and insinuation that dogs Nora from workplace to workplace, even as she departs her stenography job in Seattle in favor of teaching school in the country. Salient here is June Howard's focus on the figure of the schoolteacher in American regional literature as a figure of both authority and vulnerability, as someone who frequently arrives in a rural community from outside and represents "the promise and the danger" of non-local knowledges (50-51).[56] To imagine a schoolteacher who is also an Alaska widow is to create a woman who is doubly associated with the risks of outsiderdom.

Biographical resonances

Edith Maude Eaton (1865-1914) was born in the northwestern English town of Macclesfield to a Chinese mother, christened Grace Trefusis, and a white British merchant-class father, Edward Eaton.[57] Chapman's exhaustive biographical work on the Eatons has located the

[56] See Howard 26-27 for a discussion of "The Alaska Widow" in terms of both the schoolteacher figure and a poetic intertext, Byron's 1814 "Ode to Napoleon."

[57] Biographical sources on Eaton in addition to Chapman's "Introduction" include volumes by Annette White-Parks and Dominika Ferens. One of Eaton's younger sisters, Winnifred, was also a successful author who published "Japanese" stories under the name Onoto Watanna, as well as a novel of the American West, among other works including memoirs, Hollywood screenplays, and one cookbook co-authored with another Eaton sister, Sarah. Winnifred's granddaughter Diana Birchall published a biography that presents more sources regarding the Eaton

family in a transnational scope even before the later migrations that brought them to England and North America. For instance, she reveals that Edith's mother, born Achuen Amoy, had been purchased as a child to perform in a traveling acrobatic troupe that toured the U.S. and Europe, (Chapman "Introduction" xvi; "Biographical Timeline"). At nine years old, Achuen was "rescued" from the acrobats by Protestant missionaries while the troupe was performing in London ("Biographical Timeline"). Under the Christian name Grace, she later went to China to work herself as a missionary, where she met and married Edward Eaton ("Biographical Timeline"). With their oldest children, the Eatons serially migrated between England and New York state several times before finally settling in French-speaking Montreal (Chapman "Introduction" xvi). There, the family built connections to transnational communities in the city—including British elite and Chinese merchant and migrant groups—most strikingly through Edward Eaton's role as a labor smuggler (Chapman "Introduction" xvi). U.S. prohibitions against immigration from China meant that passing through Canada, which imposed a burdensome head tax (a fine) on the Chinese entering its borders rather than banning them outright, served as an alternative route to the labor markets of America. Edward and his associates aided Chinese men to make the border crossing at Montreal into upstate New York through a variety of clever stratagems and exploits that his eldest daughter chronicled in some of her early published writings (Chapman "Introduction" xvi). Edith may have even assisted her father and one associate to break out of a Plattsburgh, NY jail after they were arrested on smuggling charges.[58]

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family. The Winnifred Eaton Archive is a digital edited collection of Winnifred's works that also presents key highlights from Chapman's research on the family at large and the cultural negotiations represented in the Eaton sisters' diverse practices of racial identification and authorship.

[58] Chapman discusses contemporary newspaper reports of Edward Eaton's 1896 escape that indicate that he was assisted by "three ladies residing in Montreal, including a daughter who is described as "a bright young lady who speaks English and Chinese with equal fluency" ("In United States Court," qtd. in Chapman "Introduction" xxvi). In one of the involutions of diaspora, Edith, who was long believed by scholars not to know any Chinese, appears, on

Edith Eaton sustained a version of the restless movement across geographical sites and borders that characterized her familial culture. During her short but intensely prolific career as a professional writer, she ranged from northern Ontario, Jamaica, California, Seattle, and Boston. She intermittently worked as a stenographer and advertising copywriter in addition to publishing journalism, travel stories, and short fiction for adults and children. After an early period living mainly in Montreal and publishing works in Canadian outlets, she began pursuing publication in American outlets. Apart from Montreal, her most extended home base would be found in Seattle, where, like Nora Leslie, she spent time working as a stenographer in a legal office (Chapman "Appendix B" 250). Her correspondence and autobiographical writing indicate the existence of a novel she had completed by 1912 and was attempting to publish, but this manuscript remains undiscovered ("Sui Sin Far").

The myriad routes of migration and imperial expansion bundled into Eaton's individual and family history created complex pathways for her identification with the subjects and spaces of her writing. Chapman writes that Eaton "financially benefited from and contributed to the rhetoric of expansion and imperialism through her stenographic and advertising work for transcontinental railway companies and publications in expansionist west coast American magazines and Caribbean newspapers" (160). At the same time, these vantage points on the circulation of story and cultural narrative contribute to her critical mapping of empire in the plot of "The Alaska Widow" and other texts. The story stages the birth of mixed race identities through the "intimacies of empire," though without going so far as to envision the resulting subjectivities that might be produced in this context. This type of imaginative work would

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the account of both autobiographical and other sources, to have been studying the language as an adult. On this evidence for her learning and using Chinese, see Chapman "Finding Edith Eaton" 265. Whether she indeed spoke Chinese "with equal fluency" as her home language is a different matter, of course.

receive fuller expression in her stories of Chinese American characters and Chinatowns largely set in the expanding U.S. west. All of this resonates with the relative and relational forms of security and precarity she inhabited as a mixed race Chinese North American woman born a British colonial subject, whose family settled in a francophone niche of Canada—a newly confederated, predominantly English-speaking nation whose own military skirmishes with resistant Métis populations were just starting to flare out as Eaton began her professional career in the late 1880s.

Spiraling frames and narrative remediation

In this section, I dwell on the complex structure of "The Alaska Widow." Around a core kernel of story— the wedding interrupted, the Indian wife revealed, the divorce initiated—Eaton constructs an expanding spiral of frame narratives surrounded by more frame narratives. The spiral metaphor holds only so far, however; no smooth, continuous sequence, these expanding frame narratives announce themselves as incomplete, discontinuous, and fragmented. Jumping about in time and space, they gradually parcel out certain information and interpretations, while withholding others.[59] Moreover, what they convey and how they convey it is itself a variegated compilation of texts, media, and speech acts, ranging from rumor, gossip, and praise to reported speech, letters, court records, a deathbed confession, and one photograph.

At the time that Eaton published in *The Bohemian,* it was an up-and-coming publication with a newly ambitious artistic agenda. According to Albert Parry's *Garrets and Pretenders: a*

[59] Related to the broken spiral of frame narratives Eaton constructs for "The Alaska Widow," we might consider a 2013 edited collection, *Regional Modernisms*, which urges attention to the "fractured, multiscale geographies" of modernism (Alexander and Moran 2). Themes of narrative and epistemological unreliability and storyteller bias appear front and center in the story "Its Wavering Image" from *Mrs. Spring Fragrance,* which explores a Chinese American woman's encounter with a white male journalist visiting her beloved Chinatown.

History of Bohemianism in America (1933), the magazine had undistinguished provincial origins, leading a "peaceful rural existence unmarred by any striking contribution to arts and passion" in upstate New York (201). It changed hands in 1905 and its editorial office shifted to New York City under James Knapp Reeve (Mott 117).[60] From this point on, "[s]tarting with January, 1906, for the same ten cents, the *Bohemian* began to swell in size, illustrations, and general tone" (Parry 262). Eaton's two published stories in *The Bohemian* are thus artifacts of this dramatic shift in the "The Alaska Widow." Connecting it to "Woo-Ma and I," the one other story she published in *The Bohemian* (January 1906), will generate a keener sense of Eaton's ambitions, stylistic decision-making, and experimentalism in the more spacious venue provided as *The Bohemian* started to "swell" in its artistic ambitions as a publication.

"Woo-Ma and I" shares strong throughlines with "The Alaska Widow" around the themes of interracial sexual relationships outside the bounds of conventional marriage and mobility across national borders. "Woo-Ma and I" follows a pair of biracial white and Chinese American sisters who grow up in close harmony only to be tragically parted as adults. One sister becomes the kept woman of a caddish white man, with the implication that she is rejecting her Chinese selfhood through sexual abasement to a man who does not love her. To atone for this searing combination of sexual and racialized transgressions, she flees to the U.S.-Canada border dressed as a boy and becomes a human smuggler, assisting Chinese men to make the risky crossing. She later dies in this perilous border space, leaving her sister and father bereft.

"Woo-Ma and I" and "The Alaska Widow " are both texts that develop unusual and distinctive storylines and political valences, while also engaging with popular themes and topics.

[60] *The Bohemian* would later be acquired in 1909 by Theodore Dreiser, who oversaw a brief run of four issues before the magazine finally folder (Mott 117). This circumstantial detail helps illustrate the centrality of little magazines within better-known histories of American letters.

Both texts steer in the direction of a public appetite for exotic "miscegenation dramas" that played on white fears about race mixing; however, they upend the usual white-woman-racialized-man pairing that typically made such dramas function to justify policies and practices of white supremacist regulation of social and intimate relations (Pascoe 86).[61] In disrupting these conventional white supremacist panic narratives around interracial sex and marriage, Eaton's stories in *The Bohemian* project earnest critiques of American racism and colonialism in a reformist, progressivist vein that itself enjoyed a certain level of popularity in the landscape of turn-of-the-century print.[62] Finally, in broad strokes, both stories assert a very conventional and familiar morality: a fallen woman suffers from guilt and dies in "Woo-Ma and I"; in "The Alaska Widow," the webs of suspicion around Nora Leslie's sexual reputation are thoroughly dispelled to make way for her deserved happiness and marriage with Howard Crathern.

Taken together, these thematic and plot elements evidence much of what Kirstin MacLeod argues was the particular cultural capital cultivated by American "little magazines" as a fin de siècle modernist form. These little magazines—"little" because each issue was "usually from between sixteen and sixty-four pages, with little or no advertising"—communicated a "selectivity [that] was strategic and symbolic" (MacLeod 99). These magazines' self-fashioning through editorial choice and commentary, as well as their presentation as artfully designed material objects, frequently serve to position them as a refreshing alternative to an anonymous mass culture on the one hand, and a stuffy and boring high culture on the other (MacLeod 94). Another avenue for fashioning this "alternative kind of cultural capital" was through the

[61] Pascoe emphasizes the political function of circulating miscegenation dramas—to reinforce white supremacy and position state intervention and regulation of marriage as the solution to a whiteness (usually imagined in the form of white womanhood) threatened by the enticing but destructive lure of race mixing (86, 93).
[62] See Johanningsmeier 227-231 for an examination of another periodical, *The Westerner,* in which Eaton published and which spoke to readers interested in inclusive perspectives on Asian immigration into the U.S., among other topics.

remediation of popular texts and themes (MacLeod 59). In Eaton's case, as we have seen, these popular objects of literary remediation include newspaper "miscegenation dramas," reformist politics, morality tales of vice punished and virtue rewarded, as well as the suspenseful love triangle plot embedded in "The Alaska Widow." Remediating popular forms allowed little magazines like *The Bohemian* to claim their own distinctive voice through that remediation: "In aesthetic terms, [little magazines] took a fine press format to remediate as high art what may have been fairly standard content" (MacLeod 103). The boundaries and passages navigated by the little magazine as a modern form is therefore not dissimilar to the passage experienced by Pauline Johnson's protagonist Hoolool. Hoolool becomes recognized as an artist through the production of finely crafted copies that, as miniatures, are easy to circulate and commodify. Similarly, the little magazine was a small, relatively inexpensive artifact that came into material being through technologies for the mass circulation of print while simultaneously allowing readers, writers, editors, and publishers to claim a culturally distinctive identity and personality in an age of mass consumption through the magazine's small, selective format and its invocation of a small, select community of readers and writers.[63]

For Eaton, then, publishing longer, more complex short stories on popular themes in a self-consciously aestheticist venue like *The Bohemian* was a way for her to express her own artistic individuality while also making money.[64] This was a very different venue for her powers

[63] On what MacLeod calls the quality of "little magazineness" and the sense of community invoked by it, see 95-112. See MacLeod 30-31, 58-59 on the growing cultural importance of personality, self-expression and individuality, which she connects to the little magazine as a vehicle for cultivating these values for a rising professional-managerial class. MacLeod draws here on Warren I. Susman's framework wherein an older nineteenth century "culture of character" transitions to a "culture of personality" in the twentieth (30).

[64] The *Fly-Leaf* and the *Lotus* were little magazines in which Eaton published early in her career; both magazines were edited by her brother-in-law Walter Blackburn Harte. On his career in Anglophone Montreal literary culture, see Doyle. Harte was assisted by his wife Grace (Eaton) Harte in putting out *The Fly-Leaf*, which he claimed would be "a magazine of the New, the Modern, the Young Man, the Young Woman, To-day and its stirring, probing fantastical spirit" ("The Stir in Literature" 2; qtd. in Doyle 93). The third issue featured "The Gamblers" by "Sui

than the newspaper journalism, travel pieces, and shorter short stories that comprised the lion's share of her literary labor. Moreover, much of her time was absorbed by non-creative tasks. Like her contemporary, the African American author Charles Waddell Chesnutt, Eaton worked as a stenographer, taking dictation; she also mentions writing advertising copy for a railway company in her autobiographical essay "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" (130). In another essay published in the *Boston Globe* in 1912, two years before she died of heart disease, she describes the intense strain that stenographic work posed "for one whose mind must make its own images" ("Sui Sin Far" SM6). If the selectivity of the little magazine was a vehicle for an emerging "culture of personality" in the twentieth century that prized values like individuality and self-expression (MacLeod 30-31), the fact that a woman writer of color was intermittently employing this vehicle while representing Asian American and Native figures is especially worthy of note.

The publication date of "The Alaska Widow" in particular invites us to situate this work at a moment in Eaton's career when she was making a broadly ambitious bid to attain economic security through literary success. It coincides with her 1909 move to Boston to write full-time (Chapman *Becoming* 250). Work by Lucas Dietrich on the publication context of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* suggests further connections between *The Bohemian* stories and the major work for which Eaton/Sui Sin Far is known to American literary history. In his book *Writing Across the Color Line,* Dietrich shows that the Chicago publisher of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance,* A.C. McClurg and Company, represented a small wing of the company's expansive commercial enterprise, which "earned the vast majority of its revenue not as a publisher as a wholesale distributor of retail goods to the expanding market of the western United States" (113). This "unusual business

Seen Far" (Doyle 95). *The Lotus* was a Kansas City-based magazine that Harte took over as editor in August 1896 (Doyle 109).

model" afforded the literary wing of the company, and its editor, Francis G. Browne, who also published W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk,* "significant editorial freedom" in shaping its catalog for literary content, which included the representation of racial difference to white audiences (Dietrich 113). The commercial retail wing of the company also funded other niche literary pursuits that interested its owner, Alexander Caldwell McClurg, such as the collecting and selling of rare books, and, from 1880 to 1892, the publication of the literary magazine *The Dial,* which, under different ownership in the 1910s, would later bring key works of literary modernism by T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and others to print (Dietrich 119-120). This context sheds new light on *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* as a self-consciously literary project taken up by a self-consciously literary publisher. By extension, I suggest that grouping "The Alaska Widow" and *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* together in this phase of Eaton's career helps map the multiple venues in which she pursued her multilayered ambitions and enacted her modern aesthetic identities.

The topos and temporality of the gold rush widow

The figure of the Alaska widow was another popular object for creative remediation that Eaton built into her text. Here, I survey samples of popular literature that demonstrate the modular, highly abstractable quality of the gold rush widow as a term and concept in U.S. culture—that she could be modified to fit any global gold rush site for masculine class mobility and would remain the same as a figure of devalued womanhood.

The most direct ancestor to the Alaska widow as a cultural figure was the California widow, a woman left behind in the first great gold rush of the nineteenth century. An 1860 travel narrative by William Hancock called *An Emigrant's Five Years in the Free States of America*

informs readers that "The term 'California Widow,' is frequently heard as applied to ladies whose worse halves have left them, for an indefinite period, for the Golden State" (78). This tone of light, ironic humor is frequently attached to the gold rush widow and perhaps helps account for its resilience as a topos for popular circulation. This 1860 treatment comments on the California widow in the context of what the writer terms a lack of "inhabitiveness" among American men, explaining that "Attachment to place is a sentiment which finds little encouragement in a country where every thing is new and changing" (Hancock 78). The term later enters reference works like an 1889 dictionary of American slang, which defines the California widow as "A married woman whose husband is away from her for any extended period; a 'grass widow' in the least offensive sense of that term. The expression dates from the period of the Californian gold fever when so many men went West, leaving their wives and families behind them" (Farmer 116). The concept of the California widow even reached readers outside the U.S. A 1942 publication by the American Dialect Society cites an 1858 German language source which explains that "The California widow has her home in America and especially in New York and its surroundings" ("New Evidence" 125). This instance of the California widow also reminds us that the East-West trajectory of this earlier fortune-seeking man would be remapped in its 1890s Alaska iteration to trace an itinerary going from south to north, and through coastal sea passages rather than transcontinental travel.

The idea of the gold rush widow as a re-mappable signifier of masculine venture and feminine stasis appears virtually at the moment of the Klondike gold rush. An 1897 piece in the St. Paul Globe asks: “The craze of 1849 developed the 'California widow' in thousands of villages 'back in the states;' will one of the products of this Klondike craze give us a crop of Alaska widows?" This later iteration of the gold rush widow thus shows us how Americans

expected new figurative widows to arise—sprouting almost out of the ground like “a crop” of plants—in tandem with new and distant fonts of extractive wealth at the outer reaches of the expanding U.S.

The gold rush widow is therefore not unlike other modern figures that emplot and emplace points of confluence between the local and the global, such as the "participant-observer" ethnographer and folklore collector or the middle-class writer-narrator of regional fiction. However, the gold rush widow is far more circumscribed in her imagined subjectivity, a passive object of ethnographic and lexicographic narration and scrutiny, rather than someone who can voice the texture of her own liminality.[65] This is especially apparent in another newspaper piece from May 1898 that narrates an actual scene of men departing for the gold fields on a ship:

> Once all things animate and inanimate booked for passage were aboard, the onlookers, who have come to the pier out of curiosity or for sadder reasons, closed around the gangway. By common accord the women, already called "Klondike widows," get into the front rank. They look up into the confident faces of the men on the deck above, murmur "Good-bye!" and watch the vessel until it is far out into the stream, until handkerchiefs becomes specks and specks are blotted out. There is shouting, there is cheering, there is glamour, and to follow--the wait of six months, a year, perhaps two years, without regular mail communication, for the outcome of a hazardous venture, ending perhaps in

[65] Chapman notes that “Eaton links citizenship to the freedom to circulate stories about oneself— something neither the unnamed Alaskan woman nor Nora can do” (“Affinities” 159).

> unheralded death holding its secret in the mystery which heightens misery with fluttering hope and fear for month on month." ("To the Land of Gold")

This passage shifts from the past tense of reportage ("all things [. . .] were aboard"; "the onlookers [. . .] closed around the gangway") to the present tense when describing the indeterminate timeline for male return or non-return inhabited by those women: "They look up until the confident faces of the men, murmur 'Good-bye!' and watch the vessel until it is far out into the stream." These women are "already called 'Klondike widows'," converted immediately into types before their men are even out of sight. They pass almost instantaneously into a cultural storyline that is tied to the timeline of their men's departure and hoped-for return, a plot that is oppressively linear in its temporality while having no clear endpoint in sight. Even the endpoint created by the death of the adventurer might not be readily conveyed to the woman he left behind, for "without regular mail communication" the "unheralded death" might "hol[d] its secret in the mystery which heightens misery" as the woman clings to hope in the absence of a message.

It is perhaps by now clear that even if what happens in "The Alaska Widow" is difficult to discern for readers—and for Howard Crathern—that this profoundly ordinary and everyday experience of epistemological uncertainty is threaded through the figure of the gold rush widow. We might call this experience a species of modernist difficulty, produced through looping ellipses upon ellipses of frame narratives and densely allusive but ultimately inconclusive moments of silence.[66] In the vein of allegorical interpretation, we might also say that the difficulty of "The Alaska Widow" encodes a kind of imperial unknowing in the figure of Crathern as both the governor of Luzon and a kind of proxy for the white reader. His challenges

[66] On difficulty and indeterminacy as a widely recognized (and sometimes parodied) attribute of literary and visual forms of modernism, see Diepeveen.

in figuring out the truth about the woman he loves are a product of circumstance on one level; but he is also in a large part responsible for his own ignorance. In the opening episode of the story, instead of speaking to the woman and trusting her to tell the truth, he resorts to consulting official records. These records give him information but not wisdom; their knowledge-making is partial and incomplete. But oral storytelling does not necessarily come to the rescue. Eaton reveals the partiality of each storyteller; that Crathern stumbles on the truth is only by a chance, second-hand encounter with a white man's testimony in the form of Beale's deathbed confession. In the end, the Governor has not been much harmed by his unknowing; Nora has sustained the bulk of the harm by remaining a kind of permanent Alaska widow with an ambiguous, if not outright suspicious, reputation among her fellow white women.

Looking through the ambiguously positioned white woman to the broader web of racial and sexual power relations in which she is folded, the story invites us to contemplate the failure of imperial projects of knowledge-making in U.S. territories (Alaska) and colonies (the Philippines).[67] Even as these projects, in the Filipino context, accumulated stolen and extracted material objects for U.S. museums and archives (See) and wove potent cultural fantasies around subjected and indigenous populations with regard to race, gender, and sexuality (Mendoza), the manifest ambiguity of "The Alaska Widow" outlines the contours of unknowing around which these projects revolve.

[67] Eaton spent a brief but influential period of time working as a journalist in Jamaica, an experience which inspired stories set on the island, such the anticolonial tale "The Sugar Cane Baby" Another story, "Away Down in Jamaica," is easily the most sensationalist fiction text in Eaton's oeuvre for its depiction of death and murder driven by sexual jealousy among a multiracial cast of characters. Among other shocking events in the story, a woman of color takes violent revenge after having been spurned by her white lover in favor of a white woman and murders her rival with poison.

Geishas, widows, and widows

In this section, I pursue some of the fictional intertexts to "The Alaska Widow," examining some popular short stories that illuminate the unique attributes of Eaton's treatment of the figuratively widowed or abandoned woman.

A pre-Alaska gold rush widow makes an implied appearance in the well-known regionalist text, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "A New England Nun" (1891). Freeman's protagonist, Louisa Ellis, has promised to marry a man who has been absent for fourteen out of the fifteen years of their engagement, off seeking his fortune in Australia.[68] Freeman's text is conspicuously spare on details as to what this man, Joe Daggett, has been doing in Australia and how he has been doing it; that said, Joe's youthful ambition to "strike out into new fields," as well as the visible fruits of his years of work abroad (for example, he is able to pay for what we might describe today as home remodeling), all connect him to a series of nineteenth-century gold rushes, first starting in 1851, that produced a surge of economic activity in and around the British colony (Freeman 6, 8).[69] Louisa's eventual choice to break off her engagement to the now-affluent Joe (who, like Frank Beale, becomes the center of a love triangle), centers her own pleasure and self-determination. As a subjectivity-rich—and apparently financially comfortable—figure of divergence from the passive, suffering gold rush widow as type, Louisa inhabits the indeterminate temporality of her figurative widowhood as a space of opportunity. Somehow afforded with her own house and means of support, Louisa claims her own time by

[68] On the destination of Joe Daggett's fortune seeking, Judith Fetterley and Marjory Pryse write that this scenario presents Australia as "a colonial entity designed precisely to allow those meant from dominant nations who cannot make their fortune at home to make it there" (243).

[69] Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell's *A Global History of Gold Rushes* (University of California Press, 2018) is a valuable one-stop source on gold rush locales and networks including and beyond California and the Klondike.

immersing herself in a hyper-feminized version of domestic life, engaged in an array of non-productive, or even anti-productive, activities such as "ripp[ing] a seam for the mere delight of sewing it together again" and confecting meals for herself out of delicate, jewel-like assortments of things like "sugared currants" and "little cakes" arranged on ornate glassware and china.[70] Th arresting image of ripping the seam to sew it back again best distills Louisa's meticulous style of queer domesticity, in which the comforting arts of the well-kept middle-class home are undertaken not in service to a propertied husband or a nuclear family, but instead for the "mere delight" of doing them.[71]

If Louisa Ellis represents a protofeminist departure from the gold rush widow as a figure of suffering, devalued womanhood, these latter attributes are amplified in the case of racialized counterparts to the gold rush widow, such as in the figure of the racialized woman abandoned by a U.S. military man. As a critical reflection on the "intimacies of empire" (Stoler) through sensational tales of cross-racial sex and betrayal, "The Alaska Widow" shares resemblances with John Luther Long's popular short story "Madame Butterfly" (1898). In Long's story, a white naval officer posted to Japan avails himself of local customs of informal, temporary marriage in port cities to set up house with a young geisha, Cho-Cho-San, eventually abandoning her and their mixed race child in favor of marriage to a white woman.[72] Influenced by an 1887 French novel, Long's version of the abandoned geisha story achieved further circulation in the form of a

[70] These images also convey a woman taking pleasure of several kinds of abstraction—a liberatory abstraction from reproductive domesticities, abstraction as immersion within one's own thoughts and impulses, and a kind of material-visual abstraction as linked to the intentional composition of material objects in space.
[71] For one source on queerness in regional fiction, see Fetterley and Pryse's chapter on "regionalism as 'queer' theory," which suggests that Freeman in particular "writes from inside a queer perspective more than do other regional writers" (330). Studies of singleness and single women have positioned "A New England Nun" within a related, but slightly different tradition wherein the single woman does not diverge from culturally normative activities like keeping house but inhabits them in a distinct way; on this, see Fama.
[72] Susan Koshy discusses the practice of temporary marriage in Japanese port cities between Japanese women and foreign men in her treatment of Long's version of the geisha story (30).

stage play adaptation by David Belasco. Both Eaton's and Long's stories stage allegories of empire in which the white American man advances his sovereign mobility at the cost of a "feminized colony" space, Japan for Long, and indigenous Alaska and the Philippines for Eaton (Chapman "Affinities" 158).

Long's touch is much heavier than Eaton's—his American soldier carries the full name of Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton—while his Japanese characters channel racist caricature. Cho-Cho-San and her co-ethnics are scripted, for example, in a nearly illegible, disjointed English meant to signal (naturally) that they are either speaking Japanese amongst themselves or speaking English with foreign accents.[73] That said, "Madame Butterfly" and "The Alaska Widow" both introduce a strong critique of patriarchy. Both stories depict the racialized woman as subject not just to white supremacist colonial power, but to the power of men in her community.[74] After Pinkerton's departure, a local figure of authority around gender, sex, and marriage—a male marriage broker, or nakodo—attempts, against Cho-Cho-San's will, to arrange a marriage for her to a wealthy Japanese man, Yamadori.[75]

In Eaton's story, the equivalent power dynamic around indigenous masculinity is more muted, but still perceptible. The listener learns that the Indian girl "considered herself his [Beale's] wife, having been given to him, at his request, by her dying father" (493). Dense with

[73] Much of Sui Sin Far's writing takes direct aim at these racist conventions of linguistic representation. For instance, when representing Chinese figures in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, she "rarely choo[ses] to write a transliteration of a Chinese character's immigrant English" (Fetterley and Pryse 192). Her prose fiction often encodes intra-Chinese speech and writing in a highly formal, deliberately archaic register that, among other things, displays her own command of multiple Englishes; when she does choose to code speech as immigrant speech, it is nearly always in service to strategies of double-voicing, where the immigrant expresses a truth that their white, American-born interlocutors fail to hear. On these dynamics in U.S. ethnic modernist literature, see Miller.

[74] Koshy emphasizes the critique of imperialism encoded in Cho-Cho-San's victimization, describing it as a portrait of "Japanese femininity caught between Japanese patriarchy and American racism" (32), arguing that other iterations of the Butterfly story, such as the version popularized in Giacomo Puccini's opera of the same name, lack the critical edge of Long's.

[75] The wealthy Yamadori has spent time living in America, a circumstance that enriches and reinforces Long's critique of how U.S. empire is amplifying and exploiting gendered power dynamics within subordinated nations and groups.

gendered pronouns ("his wife, "given to him, at his request"), this passage presents the Indian woman as the object of transfer between men. But it is also highly ambiguous as to the emotional tenor and political valences one might draw from it. The figure of the dying Indian father evokes EuroAmerican narratives of inevitability around indigenous disappearance from the North American continent, with the prospect of intermarriage and sexual "amalgamation" as a vehicle for accelerating that moment of extinction. But the fact that an instance of intermarriage is endorsed by an Indian reflects the more horizontal forms and spaces for cross-racial intimacy and exchange occasioned by contact. This includes early North American histories of political alliance and exchange in which intermarriage with Europeans not only served to benefit Indians but functioned as an extension of their political power in a given region.[76]

The Great Interrogation

Eaton is frequently studied within traditions of Asian American and Asian Canadian writing, or ethnic writing more broadly; she is less often compared with white writers, except in the case of white female regionalists like Jewett or Freeman. But Jack London's fiction is a salient place to visit scenes of Indian-white sexual relationships in northern climes. He was, in addition to writing popular adventure stories of the Klondike region where he himself had been a gold rush adventurer, also a notable writer of "yellow peril" fiction. The literature of "yellow peril" voiced fears about a Chinese invasion of an endangered, white-identified America; in its nineteenth-century iteration, it often centered on the threat of lascivious and immoral Chinese men to white female purity.[77] Later fin de siècle versions of yellow peril coincided with

[76] These early, more horizontal, if not even Indian-centric scenarios of Indian-European relations are mapped in numerous historical studies like Richard White's *The Middle Ground,* Susan Sleeper-Smith's *Indian Women and French Men,* and Michael Witgen's *An Infinity of Nations.*

[77] On the genre of "yellow peril" fiction, see Wu; on Jack London's contributions to it, see Lye 12-46.

legislative measures, especially in California, to limit land-owning and control of land by “aliens ineligible for citizenship” (Lye 9-10). But this is partly the interpretive intrigue posed by "The Alaska Widow."

In this section, I argue that the elliptical texture of Eaton's narrative of Indian-European encounter at the wedding outlines a transitory politics of solidarity that is absent from London's narrative. I suggest that this politics of solidarity does not depend on trying to know the other--that recognizing a single point of connection, and not necessarily a common web of relations, is enough. This analysis of the text builds on Chapman's discussion of the asymmetrical "cross-cultural affinities,” or points of comparison rather than spaces of sameness, around which Eaton frames the Indian woman and the white woman. She creates them both as Alaska widows while tracing the distinct imperial channels by which they arrive at this shared signifier, which is distinct from a shared social or geographic location, though the "Alaska widow" as a compound term uses that very structure (who she is and what place makes her that thing). This idea partly depends on the modular quality that I have discussed earlier in connection to the Alaska widow as topos and temporality—that Americans expect new types of widows to instantaneously appear, almost as the Indian woman shows up at Nora's wedding, and that new modifiers like California, Klondike, or Alaska can be applied to this type to register modern economic change against the backdrop of feminine stasis, dependency, and diminution.

"The Great Interrogation" was first published in the popular monthly magazine *Ainslee's* in December 1900 and was collected the following year into *The God of His Fathers and Other Stories*. This volume was put out by McClure, Phillips, and Company, a wing of the vigorous publishing enterprise run by S.S. McClure, an Irish immigrant who later became most famous for publishing the muckraking corporate exposé journalism of Ida Tarbell in pages of his own

monthly, *McClure's,* in 1902. The literary authors published in *McClure's* were just as notable, including London, Willa Cather, Mark Twain, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Rudyard Kipling. Correspondence by Eaton shows she also submitted work to *Ainslee's* and *McClure's* around 1900, though she was ultimately unsuccessful in reaching these more star-studded national venues (Chapman "Introduction" xlvii). Needless to say, Eaton would have known London's work in these magazines, and "The Alaska Widow" may represent her own foray, in the fine press format of the little magazine, into obliquely mediating popular "Northland" and *Call of the Wild*-style themes of masculine adventuring.

In an anticipatory reverse-mirror image to "The Alaska Widow," London's 1900 story follows a white woman, Karen Saythe, an actual widow who journeys to Alaska in pursuit of a former lover after her first husband has died. Throughout the story, she is referred to by her married name, Mrs. Saythe, which flags her alliance with "the white man's legal formality" of marriage that comes under suspicion in Eaton's text for its settler colonial implications. Mrs. Saythe's voyage north dramatically interrupts and enlivens the bachelor society of adventurers gathered in "womanless Dawson" of the Canadian Yukon or Klondike territory (34). But "the great interrogation" or burning question that puzzles these men is why Mrs. Saythe suddenly leaves:

> She arrived in the spring, with dog sleds and French-Canadian *voyageurs*, blazed gloriously for a brief month, and departed up the river as soon it was free of ice. Now womanless Dawson never quite understood this hurried departure, and the local Four Hundred felt aggrieved and lonely until the Nome strike was made and old sensations gave way to new. For it had delighted in Mrs. Saythe, and received her wide-armed. She was pretty, charming, and, moreover, a widow. (34)

The mirror images of "The Alaska Widow" are visible at several moments here. Instead of the sudden turning-back of a man who has just arrived home from Alaska, it is the "hurried departure" of a woman who had just come to Alaska from "down in the States" (35). Eaton's distinctive phrasing around the moment when Beale photographed "the kid"—"before the war fever took the place of the gold"—finds syntactic and thematic anticipation in the earlier text. What finally distracts the Dawson men from Mrs. Sayther's mysterious departure is when “the Nome strike was made and old sensations gave way to new." In the timeline of London’s story, it is the Nome gold rush that is the new development following on the Klondike gold rush, rather than the passage from the Nome gold rush to the outbreak of war in the Philippines, as in Eaton’s text. “The Alaska Widow” thus represents one tick forward on the feverishly unfolding linear temporality of new sites of imperial venture continually cropping up.

Finally, the rapturous, "wide-armed" reception of Mrs. Sayther as a literal widow among a “delighted” community of men is turned on its head in Nora Leslie's experience. As a woman known to be an Alaska widow, with the additional stigma of divorce stacked onto her already ambivalent status, Nora meets an endless stream of suspicion and opprobrium as voiced by women. This includes the stenographer co-worker who first spreads the initial rumors to Crathern in Seattle, as well as the rural communities to which Nora departs to serve as a schoolteacher when she is too ill and exhausted to continue in the law office. It is in the setting of a country schoolhouse where Crathern finally re-unites with her at the end of the story to convey Beale's confession and confess his own misjudgment of her character. At this late point in "The Alaska Widow," it seems that Nora has just taken up a new post in a new village, and on his way to find her at the village schoolhouse, Crathern overhears fellow passengers on the stagecoach

gossiping about schoolteachers past and present.[78] All women, these speakers, with one exception, react with distaste to the news that Nora is an Alaska widow and "[o]ne, too, that was left on her wedding day" no less (495). One woman considers pulling her daughters from the school in protest, while another suggests the more structural solution of "petition[ing] the School Board to have her removed" (495). The single voice of female support heard on this stagecoach ride cautions, “There’s widows and widows,” suggesting that “it’s the widows that ain’t got any green grave in the cemetery, consoling friends, or pervision [provision] from the Lodge” that are most to be pitied (495). Here Eaton draws attention to the linguistic collapse around the two types of widow, literal and figurative—or “widows and widows”—pointing up the arbitrariness of distinguishing between an Alaska widow and a real widow given the isolation and pain both experience, and which the Alaska widow may experience more intensely without the sympathy and social support extended to her conventionally bereaved sister (495).[79] Here, the painfully indefinite timeline of gold rush widowhood floats to the surface of the text as an image, though it is a fragile bubble soon pricked, as the women shut down this speaker on the grounds of her own marginal status and opinions: “ ‘Keep quiet, mother. You don’t know what you are talking about,’ admonished a vigorous young woman” (495). Here the good country folk of regional literature appear just as harsh and biased as their metropolitan counterparts in Seattle.

As I have suggested, in “The Great Interrogation,” the geography of white-Indian encounter is reversed from Eaton’s text, as it takes place not in the continental states but in the

[78] See Howard *Center of the World* 59 on the outsider status of the schoolteacher in regional fiction.
[79] A *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article dated to March 5, 1899, “The Klondike Widow,” surveys “the many different Klondike widows in view,” from “the matter-of-fact Klondike widow, with lots of grit,” to her more fragile and selfish sisters, such as “the childless, brainless Klondike widow,” who indulges herself with “the latest fashion or fancy” while her husband is away (4). After unfolding this catalogue of types, the unnamed authors notes, “There are Klondike widows and Klondike widows, we know,” from “the bona fide article, true and good,” to “the other sort of Klondike widow” (4). 1899 was the year Eaton first moved to Seattle; whether or not she read this particular article, it offers further evidence for her interest in the Alaska widow as an abstractable type.

territory of Alaska itself. As in many of London's texts, a white man has arrived in the Northern wilderness to experience a positive and energizing encounter with primitive elements, from the icy climate and survival in dangerous situations, to loving sexual and domestic relationships with noble and helpful Native women.[80] This is consistent with how "The Great Interrogation" unfolds once Karen Saythe has completed her long trek to find her lover, Dave Payne. Another "interrogation" occurs as Karen questions Dave about the nature of his relationship with his Indian lover, Winapie, seeking to have him view it as merely as relationship of convenience, a consequence of a typical male sexual appetite and nothing more. She implores him to come away with her back to a life of ease and comfort in the States, urging:

> "But—ah!—it is only a marriage of the country—not a real marriage?"
>
> "We do not ask such questions in Alaska," he interposed feebly.
>
> "I know, but—"
>
> "Well, then, it is only a marriage of the country—nothing else."
>
> "And there are no children?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Nor—"
>
> "No, no; nothing—but it is impossible."
>
> "But it is not." She was at his side again, her hand touching lightly, caressingly, the sunburned back of his. "I know the custom of the land too well. Men do it every day. They do not care to remain here, shut out from the world, for all their days; so they give an order on the P. C. C. Company for a year's provisions, some money in hand, and the girl is content." (55)

[80] On this topos in London's work, see Auerbach's *Male Call.*

This scene of white female suasion presents the opposite to Nora's demand to her new husband in Eaton's text. The texts not only differ in what the white woman is trying to get the white man to do it, but how they try to do this. In the episode in which the wedding is recounted, based on the report of Beale's deathbed confession, the storyteller (the captain talking to the Governor Crathern) actually tells the story twice in sequence, each iteration revealing something different about the scene, but also attaching a different emotional tenor to each. The first iteration is crisp and straightforward: "The outcome was that Nora refused to live with Beale; but she made no fuss, simply stated what she would do and what she would not do, and requested Beale to marry the young Indian, who was a handsome girl in her way, and most embarrassingly faithful to the faithless. Beale, confounded and ashamed, finally yielded to Nora's wishes [. . . .]" (494). The second is electrifying, as the captain notes: "it must have been a dramatic scene" (494). In this dramatic version of Nora's refusal, the clergyman and some of the attendees protest her decision, and Nora responds by "turn[ing] upon the little priest with flashing eyes, and pointing at him cr[ying], 'Those whom God has joined together, let not *man* put asunder!'" (494). Chapman has compared this moment to a tableau vivant performance ("Affinities" 159), and it is certainly more powerful and memorable that the captain's first reconstruction of the scene. In light of the London text, however, my larger point is that in both scenes, Nora acts with speed, decision, and determination when she learns about Beale's customary marriage to the Indian woman. She does not need to interrogate him about the details. Her request that he legally marry the Indian girl arguably reflects her (Nora's) complicity in white supremacist settler assumptions about what is law and what is binding; it may also be a pragmatic strategy for encouraging the unreliable Beale to attend to his family. In either case, her first response to the arrival of the Indian woman is to

respect the "custom of the land" or the status of the "mariage au façon du pays," such as those common in early fur trading societies in North America.

I suggest that Nora's immediate response carries ties to the precipitous temporality, the instantaneous transformation from wife into widow reflected in the popular texts about gold rush widows. It activates a transitory point of solidarity between the white woman and the Indian that is inextricable from their vulnerability, which is in relationship but not precisely shared.[81] Nora does not have a child and is able to eventually get a new job; she is an orphan, like the Indian woman who was handed over to Beale by her dying father, but she does have living relatives with whom she is staying. There is textual evidence that Nora may be continually dogged by rumors and changes jobs more than once as a result; she takes her first teaching job in the country soon after Crathern takes his initial job in the Philippines, but when she and Crathern finally reunite seven years later, she is apparently just starting a new, different post at the particular schoolhouse where he rides the stagecoach out to meet her. Nora has much greater mobility and a much longer life than the Indian woman and makes a happy marriage at the end of the story. But her life is also highly discontinuous and fractured in other ways, just like the narrative of "The Alaska Widow." I believe that this choppy, time-fragmented pattern speaks in a language of modernist aesthetics to the abstractable, and disposable, nature of the Alaska widow in U.S. cultures of empire and settler colonialism.

[81] My interest in the transitory point of solidarity here resonates with Jodi Byrd's work on "the transit of empire." My thinking is that this text explores a situation in which the transitory point of solidarity has potential to be as much as or more valuable than the sustained attention implied in frameworks of sympathetic alliance or certainly sympathetic rescue. The London comparison may provide further resources for thinking in this area as well.

Conclusion

Reading "The Alaska Widow" in its little magazine context makes a strong claim not only for Eaton's engagement in fin de siècle modernism, but for her centrality to the ongoing project of reading early Asian American literature beyond the frames of sociological reportage or the dismantling of racist stereotypes, as foundational as these approaches remain. My argument about Eaton's modernism here adds to Audrey Wu Clark's analysis in *The Asian American Avant-Garde* of the "cubistic" method of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* in arraying different and discordant perspectives on Chinese American characters and on Chinatown as a "universal region" (24-25). Furthermore, "The Alaska Widow" supplies a crucial, early instance of an Asian American writer working through a key insight of twenty-first century settler colonial studies: that colonies and settler colonies constitute interrelated and distinct forms of domination.[82]

In the final chapter, I turn to a text composed in the full flower of what is sometimes called a period of late modernist aesthetics, in the 1930s.[83] In John Joseph Mathews's first novel, features like discontinuous, episodic narratives and attention to varied forms of text, speech, writing, translation, and reportage are in full force, as well as the proliferation of a wide array of Native and non-Native types in the space of the Osage reservation. I follow this project's interest in figures and literary practices of abstraction into Mathews's depiction of the white reservation agent in the novel.

[82] On the distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism, see Verancini 3.
[83] See Tyrus Miller's *Late Modernism.*

Chapter 3

Machine for Sovereignty: Agents and Agency in John Joseph Mathews's *Wah'Kon-Tah*

In this chapter, I turn to a historical novel of this time period published in 1932, John Joseph Mathews's *Wah'Kon-Tah: The Osage and the White Man's Road.* I argue that Mathews's representation of the reservation agent as a kind of machine generates a subtle but powerful rescripting of narratives of white technological progress. My analysis is inspired Beth Piatote's discussion of the "Indian/Agent aporia," which highlights the ambivalent nature of the agent's role as a mediatory figure between the U.S. and the tribal nation he is assigned to serve. *Wah'Kon-Tah* represents the agent of the federal Indian service as a kind of machine, which I read as an iteration of the modernist automaton. The biographical particularity of the agent as a historical person is obscured in favor of a much stranger approach to the agent's role with respect to Osage sovereignty.[84] I historicize Mathews's particular treatment of this theme so familiar to studies of literary modernism—machines and the mechanical—through the Indian service's discourse on the introduction of agricultural machinery to Indian reservations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Since its publication, *Wah'Kon-Tah* has often been read as a work of history, either as a

[84] Native and Indigenous studies as a field attends to a proliferation of sovereignties, from "intellectual sovereignty" (Warrior) and "rhetorical sovereignty" (Lyons) on the literary side, to concepts like food sovereignty on the material. I see Mathews's text mainly as engaging what has sometimes been called treaty-based sovereignty or simply treaty rights, in which Native nations and groups invoke treaty agreements with the U.S. as a framework for making and renewing claims to their rights and their land (see Carlson 119). I also see the text invoking the historical memory of older, non-treaty-based forms of Osage territoriality and occupancy on the land, including hunting practices and practices of seasonal settlement, as indicated in the historical note at the end of the novel. In her work on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Americas, historian Julianna Barr discusses such practices of territoriality, including the recognition and maintenance of clear geographic borders between and among Native groups, as "the manifestation of Indian sovereignty on the land" (9).

biography of Laban Miles as reservation agent or as a history of the Osage Nation, or both.[85] This chapter responds to Susan Kalter's invitation, in what remains the only article-length treatment of *Wah'Kon-Tah* thus far, to attend to the manifold "literary dimensions" of the text as a work of historical fiction (26). My approach in this dissertation combines lenses from modernist studies and Native American literary studies in order to shape the form of attention I bring to the text.

As with my other chapters, the critical lenses I apply here brackets a strident modernism of rupture in favor of a responsiveness to the quotidian. This orientation has served as an ongoing point of entry for recognizing a "plurality of modernisms" (Friedman), including those created by Native writers and writers of color. My project here is consistent with scholarly treatments of Native-authored novels of this period as quintessentially modern forms—as iterations of "border modernism" (Schedler) centering non-metropolitan locales and cultures, and as "migrant sites" (Kandiyoti), narratives in which apparently static locales in the U.S. cultural imagination, such as the urban ethnic enclave, the remote prairie community, or, in the case of *Wah'Kon-Tah*, the stasis of the Indian reservation, reveal themselves as dynamic spaces, filled with histories and practices of regional and global movement, migration, and transnational ties.

In the sections that follow, I first provide a biographical overview of Mathews's life and career with an emphasis on the modernist themes that filter through them. Next, I outline the form and popular and critical reception of *Wah'Kon-Tah* as a text. I then explore the texture and implications of Mathews's portrayal of the agent in the novel.

[85] For instance, *Wah'Kon-Tah* has been labeled a "fictionalized biography" of Miles (Schedler); a "popular Osage history" (Roemer); Mathews's "first book-length project" (Foster); and a "historical novel" (Warrior, Kalter, Peyer).

A Modernist Life

In this section, I outline the local and transnational dimensions of Mathews's biography and career. In addition to writing texts centered on the Osage Nation and the state of Oklahoma, he also experienced a period of international travel in Europe and North Africa that parallels the international trajectories of more well-known American modernist writers of the so-called "Lost Generation" of prominent expatriate figures such as Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein.[86]

A member of the Osage Nation with Osage, French, and Welsh forebears, John Joseph Mathews (1895-1979) is often grouped together with writers like D'Arcy McNickle (1904-1977) and Christine Quintasket/Mourning Dove (1884-1936) among the most significant American Indian novelists active in the first half of the twentieth century. His published works include fiction, nature writing, biography, memoir, and tribal history writing on the Osage Nation. Mathews also served on the Osage tribal council and in 1938 founded the Osage Nation Museum, the first tribally-owned museum in the U.S., which today operates as a center for Osage culture, historical preservation, and language learning.[87]

Mathews is best known to literary scholars for his 1934 novel *Sundown*, which explores the alienation experienced by its mixed-race Osage protagonist, the aptly named Challenge Windzer. Another well-known work is his 1945 memoir *Talking to the Moon*, which details a year he spent on the Osage Agency developing closely observed portraits of nature, in addition to serving as a member of the Osage tribal council. Over his long career, Mathews published a tribal history, *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters* (1961), and, perhaps more surprisingly, a biography chronicling the life of an Oklahoma oil magnate who came to be

[86] For more detailed work on these parallels and the implications of Mathews's indigenous encounters in North Africa, see Lutenski.
[87] See "Osage Nation Museum." *Osage Nation*, 11 April 2022, https://www.osageculture.com/culture/museum.

elected state governor, *Life and Death of an Oilman: The Career of E.W. Marland* (1951). His most recent works to come to press are *Twenty Thousand Mornings* (2012), an autobiographical manuscript discovered by Susan Kalter among Mathews's papers, which are housed at his alma mater, the University of Oklahoma, in addition to her edited collection of nine previously unknown short stories about wildlife, published under the title *Old Three Toes and Other Tales of Survival and Extinction* (2015).

Mathews's biography lends itself to mapping in terms of modernism and modernity, and his experiences challenge stereotypes of the Indian as a passive bystander to—or victim of—the scientific and technological developments of the twentieth century. At the University of Oklahoma, Mathews majored in geology, a choice that spoke practically to the prominence of the oil industry in the region, as well to an interest in the expansive scales of history and temporality he would engage as a writer.[88] During World War I, he joined a significant contingent of American Indians in committing to U.S. military service, though Native people were not to be deemed U.S. citizens until 1924. This experience of wartime service evidences how, as discussed in Alicia Kent's work on ethnic and Native modernism, the Great War "functioned differently" as a historical touchstone for racialized groups in the U.S. compared to white Americans and Europeans (81). Native men's wartime service to the U.S. made a limited but powerful case for their inclusion within the American nation. As such, the Great War "paradoxically helped to promote Indian rights rather than occasioning the despair that it did for many Modernist artists" (Kent 81). Mathews trained as a pilot with the Aviation Section of the U.S. Signal Corps, an ancestor to the U.S. Air Force, eventually serving as flight instructor stateside before returning to

[88] Biographical sources on Mathews include Snyder, as well as Kalter's introduction to *Twenty Thousand Mornings.*

the University of Oklahoma to finish his senior year of college. He then spent several years abroad, studying at Oxford University, traveling across Europe and Algeria, and marrying his first wife, Virginia Hopper, in Geneva.

This period of "Lost Generation"-style cosmopolitan sojourning for Mathews was undergirded by a set of financial and political circumstances distinctive to the Osage Nation. The Osage experience of the colonial division and decimation of tribal landbases through the 1887 Dawes Act was unique among Native nations (Wilson ix). The Dawes Act imposed the policy of allotment on reservations: it divided reservation land formerly held in common by tribal nations into small, private parcels, each to be assigned (allotted) to a limited list of eligible tribal members, typically defined as the head of household for a single nuclear family unit.[89] While surface land on the Osage reservation was eventually broken up according to most provisions of the Act, the Osage successfully negotiated to retain subsurface mineral rights and continue to hold these in common as a group (Wilson 92, 97). The Osage Nation's resulting "underground reservation," in historian Terry P. Wilson's resonant phrasing, thus moderated the harms of allotment, which sought to erode tribal landbases in part by making the nuclear family, rather the tribal polity, the primary unit of belonging for Native people. The economic effects of the Osages' "underground reservation" materialized most dramatically in the 1910s and 1920s, when an oil boom took off on their lands. The practice of leasing oil-rich lots to drilling companies created a pool of profits for the Osage in which each tribal member had a share. This garnered

[89] Allotment typically defined some portion of reservation land as "surplus"—land that was unassigned to Native heads of household and therefore open to white settlement. Allotment also came with multiple restrictions (both in law and in practice) on which tribal members were eligible to be listed on the Dawes rolls to receive a private land parcel in the first place. For instance, an orphan child with no living parents who were tribal members would be allotted a mere one-eighth of a parcel, and even adults who were tribal members could be declared "incompetent" to claim or control their allotment. For an in-depth literary analysis of how Native writers responded to the Dawes Act and related aspects of U.S. and Canadian Indian policy, see Piatote, *Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship, and Law in Native American Literature* (Yale University Press, 2013).

them the reputation of being "the richest Indians in the world."[90] It also enabled them to do unequivocally modern things, like buy automobiles, or, in Mathews's case, study and travel abroad. As Emily Lutenski puts it in an essay on Mathews's "Indian internationalism," the early years of the twentieth century "manifested a particularly unified Osage experience of location, where oil wealth both tied Osages to Osage County and enabled their increasing mobility within and, indeed, beyond its boundaries" (49).

This phase of international mobility in Mathews's life gave way to more mundane experiences of middle-class modernity. He and his family lived in New Jersey and then moved to Los Angeles, where he trafficked in a different kind of mobility and relationship to place by making a living working in real estate. After his marriage ended, he returned to Oklahoma, where he began writing in earnest, driven in a large part by economic precarity of the Depression and sustained by the encouragement of his editor and friend Joseph Brandt at the University of Oklahoma Press.[91] Mathews's backgrounds in geology and aviation shape his writings, from descriptions of Osage country in terms of geological strata in *Wah'Kon-Tah* to Chal Windzer's exhilarating experience of acrobatic flight drills in *Sundown*, "watching the green earth. . . change places with the sky" (210). As such, his biography evidences the persistent presence of "Indians in unexpected places," in Philip J. Deloria's influential framing of Native people's too-often unrecognized roles in participating in and shaping modernity.

Another "unexpected place" to find a twentieth-century Native author is in a position of some influence around the publication and reception of texts about Indians. One influential role

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[90] See, for instance, a November 1920 article in *Harper's Monthly* ironically titled after the famous poem by Alexander Pope: "Lo, the Rich Indian!" (Shepherd 723). In 1924, Gertrude Bonnin co-published a report, *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians,* on the epidemic of grifters cheating Osage citizens out of their shares of oil wealth.

[91] Mathews recalled that when Brandt was struck by a writer's idea, "with his eyes rather wildly alight he would wheel to his typewriter and dash off an outline. From that moment he fired the imagination of the author, and nursed the manuscript into shape" ("Scholarship Comes Alive" 20).

Mathews played was as a reviewer of manuscripts for the University of Oklahoma Press for over thirty years (Kalter "Introduction" xxxiii). As such, he was "actively and meaningfully shaping the body of scholarship that would emerge about the Osages and affect their lives" (Kalter "Introduction" xxxiii). He also reviewed and recommended for publication a foundational work on Indian removal at large, Angie Debo's *And Still the Waters Run* (1940). An unsparing account of the U.S. expropriation of land from the "Five Civilized Tribes" in the southeast (the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole nations), the manuscript was considered potentially explosive for implicating prominent individuals in Oklahoma in political corruption.[92] It eventually found a home outside of Oklahoma with Princeton University Press, where Joseph Brandt, the former editor of the UO Press and who had moved after leaving the post of editor at the OU Press. Debo would later credit Mathews and *Wah'Kon-Tah* specifically with helping create an audience for her work. Writing to Brandt fifty years after the OU Press publication of her first book, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (1934), she expressed her surprise that this first volume had found a readership, musing that "Perhaps Wah'Kon-Tah had sparked the interest, for the Press had burst into national—perhaps world—recognition by that time."[93] In other words, the reception of *Wah'Kon-Tah* boosted a regional press with a program of publishing on regional themes into national and global significance.[94] From this perspective, Mathews contributed to the shaping of a reading public receptive to the notion of Native groups having civilizations, republics, and other complex forms of political and social life.

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[92] On the local reaction in Oklahoma to the prospect of publishing *Still the Waters Run,* see Shirley A. Leckie, *Angie Debo: Pioneering Historian* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

[93] Angie Debo, letter to Joe Brandt, 27 Oct. 1984, Joseph August Brandt Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK., Angie Debo Correspondence, Box 5, Folder 9.

[94] On editor Joseph Brandt's self-consciously regionalist agenda for the University of Oklahoma Press, see Dorman *Revolt of the Provinces* 73-75.

“Unclassified Literature”: Mixed Form and Reception History

In this section, I provide an initial orientation to the composition, shape, and structure of *Wah'Kon-Tah* with the goal of elucidating the varied reception of the text among reviewers and literary scholars.

Mathews’s critical meditation on agents, agency and sovereignty in *Wah'Kon-Tah* developed from what at first appears an unlikely point of origin: a set of journals kept by a historical reservation agent. This agent, Laban J. Miles, served two terms in the role, from 1878 to 1885 and again from 1889 to 1893, and he and his family continued living in Osage country for the rest of his life (Snyder 86). A member of the Quaker church, or the Society of Friends, Miles was part of a cohort of reservation agents appointed to the Indian service as part of President Ulysses Grant’s “Peace Policy,” which included an effort to route out corruption in the Indian service by transferring it from military to civilian control. Grant’s policy included involving reform-minded religious organizations in the Indian department by asking them to appoint their own members to key posts, including the post of agent (Prucha *The Great Father* 181-183).

Writing in 1932, historian Martha Buntin commented that it was "surprising how well [these Quaker appointees to the Indian service] fitted into the work when they had been selected by the brethren of an eastern church who had probably never seen an Indian” (250). Miles came to be a widely respected figure, whom the Osage historian Louis F. Burns counts among several agents “who had been at least partly responsible for saving the Osage people” in the wake of their removal from Kansas to the Southwest in 1871 (199). Furthermore, the Miles and Mathews families maintained a longstanding connection as friends and neighbors on the Osage reservation, where Mathews’s father, William Shirley Mathews, worked as a merchant and

banker, in addition to serving as a tribal leader. Towards the end of his life, Laban Miles expressed his hope that William's talented son might make use of the journals he had kept as agent—a compilation of what he labeled "plain old Quaker facts"—and bequeathed the material to the younger Mathews upon his death in 1931 (Snyder 86). Mathews subsequently used Miles's documentation as a starting point for the fictionalized account of the agent's life that wends through the novel.

The text that resulted from Mathews's literary engagement with the agent Miles's journals interweaves two major narrative threads, both tracking Osage history from the early years of Miles's tenure as agent in the late 1870s to shortly after his death in 1931. One thread is focused on the figure of the agent, focalizing his thoughts, perspectives, and interactions with tribal members and non-Native people on the reservation. The other narrative thread interweaves episodes centered on Osage figures themselves, including tribal leaders and participants in inter-tribal debates and negotiations with the U.S. In such episodes, the agent is a minor figure, if he appears at all. These include the immediate aftermath of the Osage Nation's removal from their Kansas reservation to their "final reservation" in Oklahoma Territory and subsequent debates and negotiations (both intra-tribal and U.S-Osage) about how U.S. treaty obligations to the Osage were to be carried out, especially in regard to urgent matters, like protecting the reservation from settler incursions and preserving Osage autonomy over the use of annuity payments—regular payments due to them by treaty, out of the interest on funds held in trust for them by the U.S. government. (The theme of managing annuity payments is central to the introductory episode I analyze in the following sections). Later episodes address the early decades of the twentieth century, most notably the oil boom that Mathews calls "the great frenzy," as well as the

"desolation on the rolling prairie" left after the boomtowns that had sprouted up in Osage county went bust and the Great Depression set in (300).

In a 1944 letter to a friend, Mathews called himself "a writer of unclassified literature."[95] The levels of unclassifiability, or narrative indeterminacy, cultivated in *Wah'Kon-Tah* as a text could be marked at several levels. For example, the two narrative threads I have discussed—which we might provisionally call the agent's thread and the Osage thread—are not sustained, coherent storylines that weave in and out view for the reader, ultimately coming together in a satisfying moment of synthesis in the closing chapters. Instead, the two threads comprise loose collocations of episodes. These episodes also court indeterminacy insofar as they do not amount to a clear perspective, instead voicing a series of pluralities, differences, tensions, and ambivalences. The Osage thread voices the stories and experiences of a rapidly changing array of Osage figures, from tribal leaders like Big Chief, Wah Ti An Kah, and Wa Tze Moh In, to the experiences of unnamed young Osage men, women, and children. One striking example discussed by Kalter is an episode in which a girl seeks the agent's help in arranging her departure for an off-reservation boarding school against her father's wishes: " 'My father,' she said in English, 'wishes to make me marry a man I don't like'" (84). Kalter writes: "Rather than reinforcing the dominant trope of the majority of boarding schools—the urge to run away—Mathews reveals that boarding school experiences themselves were multiple" (38). This is also an example of an episode wherein the vexed position of the agent comes to the fore.

Kalter's argument is that the narrative enacts a gradual but powerful decentering of the agent's perspective through a "forceful polyphony" and plurality of Osage voices and narratives is foundational to my unfolding analysis (44). If Mathews intended for *Wah'Kon-Tah* to be a

[95] Letter to Paul, 14 April 1944, John Joseph Mathews Collection, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1923-1982, Box 1, Folder 28, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

biography of Laban Miles, or even a historical novel closely anchored to Miles's experiences as agent, he takes an approach that is very different—and frankly quite strange—compared to the straightforward cradle-to-grave approach he takes recounting another white man's story in *Life and Death of an Oilman.* This latter text treats of the Oklahoma industrialist E.W. Marland's rise to Carnegie- and Rockefeller-like wealth and prominence, including ascending to the governorship of the state. While Mathews's framing of his subject's life story in terms of "Greek tragedy" brings out the more peculiar and dramatic aspects of the oil magnate's biography (most striking, Marland's decision to marry a woman who had once been his and his first wife's adoptive daughter), it follows a simple, linear approach to narrating a person's life. Mathews's contrasting method in *Wah'Kon-Tah,* of accumulating multiple narratives, collectively channels a rapidly toggling array of characters and points of view.

Marketing and Reception

While Mathews's later novel *Sundown* has received much more sustained scholarly attention, it is worth recalling the public profile his earlier work achieved at the moment of publication. *Wah'Kon-Tah* was the first university press book to be promoted as a "Main Selection" by the popular book subscription service the Book-of-the-Month Club (Warrior *Tribal Secrets* 22). A key institution of American middle-class literary culture, the Book-of-the-Month Club's selection of *Wah'Kon-Tah* for its November 1932 curated offerings to subscribers constituted an endorsement of cultural value that brought Mathews to national and international notice.[96] By 1930, the Club's business model involved contracting with publishers to pay for print runs of selected titles.[97] The University of Oklahoma Press's internal correspondence on

[96] See Radway and Rubin on the cultural significance of the Book-of-the-Month Club.
[97] On the shifting business models of the Book-of-the-Month Club during the Depression, see Raff 41-43.

this topic indicates that the first Club-sponsored print run was for 36,000 copies; a second print run had to be ordered for 44,0000 more.[98] An undated press clipping evidences the international reception recalled by Angie Debo, reporting that *Wah'Kon-Tah* had been translated into Dutch and selected as "Book of the Week" by a publication in the Netherlands.[99]

The Book-of-the-Month Club's commercial strategy of selling Mathews's Indian authenticity parallels the approach Jeff Karem identifies in his study *The Romance of Authenticity* surrounding the company's marketing of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945). With Wright, the Club took the angle of discussing the book and the author together as emblems of black poverty and abjection in the South (Karem 84-86). With Mathews, the flattening-out effect of the book's marketing was altogether more complimentary, if not less essentializing of the author. From the perspective of white book reviewers, Mathews's education in high culture as "an Oxford man" was assumed to combine with a quintessential "Indian feeling," to create a "civilized but unspoiled" impression of "a vanished life."[100]

The critical and popular fortunes of a much more well-known Native American text published in 1932 is suggestive here of key themes in the subsequent reception history of *Wah'Kon-Tah*. *Black Elk Speaks* is the account by an Oglala Lakota holy man of his early life before becoming a Catholic catechist.[101] Initially received by many non-Native readers as an unmediated document of Native spirituality and mystical prophecy, the text of *Black Elk Speaks* was later critiqued as an act of romantic ventriloquism by Black Elk's white collaborator, poet

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[98] Betty Kirk, letter to Joe Brandt, 6 Nov. 1932, University of Oklahoma Press Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK., Brandt, Joseph A. Correspondence, 1932-38, Box 4, Folder 13.
[99] "Dutch Like It, Too," newspaper clipping, unknown date and source, John Joseph Mathews Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK., Newspaper Clippings, Box 4, Folder 28.
[100] These quotations are taken from a promotional card sampling reviews from various publications and authors, including *The New York Times* and the modernist poet Mary Austin writing for *The Saturday Review* (Book-of-the-Month Club).
[101] See *The Black Elk Reader*, Clyde Holler, ed., (Syracuse University Press, 2000).

John Neihardt. More recent scholarship in Native literature, by contrast, attends to Indian agency in textual networks and literary collaborations with non-Natives. Through this optic, Black Elk's choice of Neihardt as a collaborator in the text's anticolonial critique comes to the fore; so does his strategic use of his own son, Ben Black Elk, as translator, thereby introducing another, Lakota-driven element of literary mediation for English-speaking audiences (Heflin 9). Jane Heflin suggests further that *Black Elk Speaks* be read as a modernist text, for its "polyvocal" patterns involving "mixed narratives in experimental combinations" (7).

This outline of the reception of *Black Elk Speaks,* from simple and essentializing accounts to more complex and capacious critical assessments, broadly parallels that of *Wah'Kon-Tah*. For example, similar to interpretations of Black Elk's text as unmediated speech, the early reviewers cited in the Book-of-the-Month Club's marketing campaign frequently mentioned the "poetry" and "simplicity" of its portrayal of the Indian, praising Mathews for speaking from a place of authenticity. Susan Kalter's recognition of Bakhtinian heteroglossia and polyvocalism as a strategy in the text also resonates the critical patterns surrounding *Black Elk Speaks* (45). While Kalter does not explicitly invoke literary modernism in connection to *Wah'Kon-Tah*, she draws attention to the novel's "seemingly realist poetics," and in doing so sets the stage for introducing lenses from studies of modernist narrative experimentalism (45).

In what follows, I will explore agency as a theme in the novel and then detail its formal pattern of aggregating series of short, fragmented narratives in different styles, from lyrical landscape description to dry historical accounts. This practice of modernist discontinuity sets the stage for reading the Indian agent and his positionality as complex and ambivalent, rather than simply as a top-down manifestation of settler colonial power. Reading *Wah'Kon-Tah* as a modernist text serves to deepen what is perhaps the most immediate question at hand when

encountering *Wah'Kon-Tah*: what does it mean for a Native author, for this Native author, to imagine an Indian agent in the aftermath of removal? [102]

The Agency as Osage Territory

In this section, I survey the indigenous ordinary as it is captured in *Wah'Kon-Tah* with a particular interest in the everyday meanings of "agency" that populate the novel. As evidenced in the second chapter of the novel, "The Agency of the Osages," the word "Agency" is requently used in the Indian service and historical documents as synonym for "reservation." [103] "The Agency" can also denote the reservation's organizational nerve center—essentially a very small town within the reservation—wherein official building like the agent's office were located and where trade and other essential business of the reservation would occur, such as the distribution of treaty payments. Upon describing the set of official buildings making up the Osage Agency as a centralized locale, Mathews explains:

> To the Indians these buildings meant the material evidence of the great power somewhere in 'the States.' They mean the authority of power, yet they meant service to [the Osage] themselves; they were there to serve them, and all people connected with them were there to serve them [. . . .] The traders, the employees and the agent were the symbols of that service which the powers had agreed would be theirs. (14)

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[102] See Mao and Walkowitz, *Bad Modernisms*, 2-6 for an overview of how modernism has been often understood by artists and by scholars as a fundamentally adversarial formation, focused on negative affects (shock, alienation) and confrontational postures (anti-bourgeois, anti-establishment). They suggest that this oppositional stance has diverted scholarly attention away from texts that do not overtly appear to shock or affront and which generate their critical charge by other means.

[103] As just one of a multitude of examples of the official use of the term "agency" to mean reservation, the 1875 report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs indexes a series of population statistics for each agency, from the Chiricahua Agency in Arizona to the Shoshone and Bannock Agency in Wyoming (104-121).

Mathews's account of the Agency as an official space within the reservation conveys a core tension at the heart of the role of the agent. On the one hand, the agent and the built environment associated with him communicate the "material evidence" of U.S. colonial expansion, "the authority of power." On the other hand, the agent and his buildings are intended, in keeping with nation-to-nation treaty obligations organizing the Osages' historical land cessions, to serve the Osage as a collective, if one far less powerful than the U.S.

Mathews's dwelling on the everyday meanings of "agency" amplifies the historical memory of Osage territorial power that courses through the novel. *Wah'Kon-Tah* concludes with a historical "Note on the Osages" that reminds readers that the current site of the reservation sits within the historical boundaries of Osage territory—"land over which they had formerly hunted and claimed as their own" (336). This memory also animates the commanding speeches and performances of post-removal Osage leaders.[104] I outline two critical episodes here, as they set the stage for my later discussion of the reservation agent. Early in the novel, the topic of treaty payments explodes as point of contention for tribal sovereignty. The Osage complain to the agent that they are "fed like dogs" with poor quality rations, in addition to being stripped of the dignity of being able to choose how to spend their annuity payments (28). When the agent's appeals on behalf of the Osage to the Indian bureau to change their policy of distributing rations rather than money fail, this triggers a series of tense tribal councils. At one council, a leader starkly lays out the significance and stakes of their grievance:

> This money which he [the white man] pays to us is our money. This money which comes from Washington is money paid to us for our lands in Kansas. Who is this white man to

[104] On nineteenth-century Indian diplomacy and political negotiations as public performances, see Kelderman 47-50.

say how this money should be paid? We do not want rations. We are not dogs that we should be fed like dogs. (47)

This episode illustrates two themes key to my analysis. First, it exemplifies the ambiguities of the agent's structural position in the hierarchy of the Indian service. While the reservation agent holds a certain amount of local decision-making discretion, he is ultimately subject to directives from the Indian Bureau. This in turn leaves the Osage in a vulnerable position, as they grapple with an unjust policy. In fact, no progress in favor of Osage interests is made until the tribe takes matters into its own hands, sending a delegation to Washington to meet with the Indian commissioner. Here, the agent's lack of agency is superseded by organized action on the part of tribal leaders.[105] Second, the tribal leader's speech lays out a chain of abstractions that links the Osage people to their land and their rights. The ward-trustee relationship and the ability of Washington and the Indian bureau to control at their whim how and in what form annuities reach Native nations obscures the core truth about Osage land cessions and treaty obligations expressed in the speech.

In subsequent episode, the tribal leader Wah Ti An Kah takes over the delegation of Osage leaders petitioning the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to end the practice of distributing treaty payments as food rations rather than as money. After parrying the commissioner's "patronizing" attempt to dismiss the delegation from his office, Wah Ti An Kah not only secures his agreement to end the rations, but dismisses the commisioner from his own office, saying, through an interpreter: "Tell this man it is all right now—he can go now" (56). While the interpreter softens the message in delivery—"He said his people have said all that they came to

[105] In *Red Land to the South,* James Cox suggests that the agent receives an education in Osage diplomacy at this moment (129).

say" (56)—by voicing the process of translation, the novel spotlights Wah Ti An Kah's evident command of the negotiations.

Mathews's treatment of the exercise of Osage agency (speeches and negotiations by tribal leaders) and as well as the messages sent by the Osage Agency as official architecture serve in part as a reminder that the role of agent predates the high tide of removal, when the balance of power among Native nations and the U.S. did not point to a future of inevitable settler domination. The position of agent was initially an ad hoc role in the early republic, sometimes written into treaties between tribal nations and colonists; with the acceleration of removal and the consolidation of the reservation system in the nineteenth century, the role became an increasingly formalized component of the Indian department (Prucha *The Great Father* 160-163). In the eighteenth century, the primary tie of an agent to a Native group was on a trade-centric and diplomatic footing, aimed at managing a fluid and materially beneficial relationship among distinct polities, rather than inhabiting a position of authority on a reservation with clear boundaries and managing across the overt hierarchies marked by the legal designation of Indian nations as "domestic dependent nations." While this historical moment had passed, the novel maintains its political influence and ties to histories of Osage territorial dominance.

Throughout, the novel invokes the agent's role in serving Osage treaty interests at a moment when the colonial situation erodes their capacity to exercise their own agency towards their survival as both a people and a polity.[106] The novel's vocabulary of agency also invites theoretical associations that we might attach to the term in light of social theories of agency.[107]

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[106] *Wah'Kon-Tah* might thus be considered an example of Native American "treaty literature" or "treaty-centered writing" wherein treaties are considered "both as objects of historical study and as loci of literary production" (Carlson 120). It is not the text of any particular treaty that is at issue in *Wah'Kon-Tah*, but instead the concept and and force of treaty obligations in organizing relations between the U.S. and Indian nations, with an emphasis on the obligations borne by the U.S., or what Mathews names as "service" to the Osage.

[107] On agency as a concept in social theory as it relates to Native writing, see Kelderman 24-25.

This evocative quality is reminscent of the novel's play with the language of friends, which denotes not just the warm and genuine friendships that the historical Miles developed with Osage leaders, but also his own group memberships and the Quaker as Friend. It also evokes the common self-proclaimed epithet for reform-minded whites as "friends of the Indian." By setting into play these linguistic resonances, the novel connects to longer traditions of reform and resistance.

Land, Space, and Abstraction

In this section, I take an initial inventory of narrative styles and points-of-view in the novel, so as to set the stage for a more precise analysis of Mathews's depiction of the agent.

Wah'Kon-Tah presents two separate introductions to the agent as a figure, moments and sections of the text that are distinct in terms of style and perspective, as well as in their overriding tone and tenor. The introduction takes the approach of treating Miles as a primary source. It quotes directly and extensively from a first-person account about how he first became interested in the Indian service and arrived at his appointment as agent to the Osage. I will analyze the texture and implications of this self-narration later on; for now, it is sufficient to note that the subsequent chapter—the opening chapter of the novel proper—represents a strong stylistic shift from the fairly dry historical reportage of the introduction.

One element of this departure in style is the strikingly abstract landscape description that opens the first chapter. As we will see, this passage moves from a highly abstract, geographically indeterminate point of origin into enacting a series of varying modes of perceiving space, place, and time:

> The impression was one of space; whispering space. The curved blue sky met the undulating emerald on all sides among the rounded hills; the emerald becoming darker

> and softer, the blue becoming pastel as they merged. When a line of blackjacks became the meeting space of sky and prairie, their rounded tops became black and cut definitely into the blue in such a way to suggest adventure beyond. It was wild space yet it was never silent. In summer the grasses whispered and laughed and sang, changing to mournful whispers during the autumn, then screaming like a demented woman when winter turned the emerald to copper. In the spring the breezes talked confidentially of the mating season, burdened with the scents of the earth and carrying the voices of the curlew, the sandpiper, the kill-deer, the meadow-lark, and the sonorous booming of the prairie chicken. Nothing could give a stronger impression of wild spaciousness than a buggy, or a horse and rider moving, almost imperceptibly along the trails that led from "the States" to the Osage Agency. (19)

From this abstract but highly immersive "impression" of "whispering space," the passage transitions into a colorful, lyrical account of the prairie landscape animated by non-human presences and patterns, from seasonal rhythms of sexual reproduction to changes in weather. This sensory portrait of the landscape is regionally located by an image that recurs throughout Mathews's body of work—the presence of the blackjacks, a species of oak that thrives in thin and sandy soil. By contrast, what appears at the end of this paragraph is not a catalogue of poetic images, but instead a political geography. A human presence in the form of "a buggy, or a horse and rider" reveals a set of demarcating boundaries dividing "the States" from the Osage Agency, the central area of the reservation where the agent maintained his office. These political borders anchor the narrative in a new way, to a particular historical moment. Our attention turns to the highly artificial, but materially significant boundaries and limits that encircle Osage territory starting in the 1870s.

This passage also indexes the political import embedded in narrative strategies for representing land and space. On one level, the passage's turn from "wild spaciousness" to the historically grounded political boundaries dividing the United States from the Osage reservation could be said to enact an understanding of a classic distinction between space and place developed by the human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. On this model, space, often understood to be abstract and empty, precedes or develops into place—a particular locale, whose specificity coheres around a perceiving subject.[108] That said, even the abstract "space; whispering space" of this land is "never silent" and therefore never truly empty. Alive with whispers, voices, and presences, it contests a colonial epistemology of discovery that seeks to render indigenous space *terra nullius,* belonging to no one and ripe for the taking. Accordingly, the historical "Note on the Osages" that bookends the novel emphasizes that while the location of the Oklahoma reservation represented the endpoint of a series of removals over the nineteenth century, this latest forced migration also placed the Osage within the historical boundaries of their territory—"land over which they had formerly hunted and claimed as their own" (336).

Overall, this rapid toggling across different modes and voices for registering the same landscape contributes to the repertoire of polyvocalism and mixed form that connects *Wah'Kon-Tah* to *Black Elk Speaks* and other works of literary modernism in this period. In a 1938 handbook, *Professional Writing*, Oklahoma writer Stanley Vestal quotes liberally from the first chapter of *Wah'Kon-Tah* as an exemplar of "emotional pattern," or "the accumulation of small touches and details until you have caused the reaction you desire" (44-46). This artifact of reception history further suggests how the novel was recognized, at least by some readers, in terms of interwar literary aesthetics.

[108] Yi-Fu Tuan emphasizes that "ideas of 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa" (6).

The Automatic Agent

Thus far, I have outlined how Mathews sets up his account of the Osage reservation as a non-human and human space, freighting it with a sense of historical and political contingency. That is, the story and significance of the land does not begin and end with the Osages' latest removal to the Southwest. The historical memory and material impact of nation-to-nation diplomatic agreements carry through even the colonial lexicon of agents, reservations, and Agency, with the ongoing treaty obligations due to the Osage Nation—"that service which the powers had agreed would be theirs"—at their core.

Through this optic of political memory, historical contingency, and treaty-based sovereignty, I turn to analyzing the portrayal of the agent himself. Rather than explicitly introducing the agent as a named, historical personage speaking for himself, as in the introduction, the opening of the novel proper offers a picture of the agent that is extremely spare, even empty. In form and content, I connect this style of description to an aesthetic concept familiar to us in discussions of literary modernism—the automaton. As a form of abstraction, the automaton presents figurations of the human profoundly dissociated from personal biography, and, in the case of the modernist interest in automatic activity and the melding of machine and human, dissociated from one's own consciousness.

The agent first appears *in medias res* in an episode dated to "One day in June about the year 1879":

> The Major sat in the side-springed buggy, which crawled slowly over the prairie, watching the road ahead of him. His eyes squinted in the brilliant June sun. He lurched from side to side as the buggy creaked and groaned over the rough trail. He sat forward with the reins held loosely in his hands, uttering an occasional 'Giddap' but failing to

> enforce his commands with a whip when the mules failed to respond. 'Giddap' was said mechanically and was associated with the feel of reins and the swaying and the creaking of the buggy. (21)

The title of "Major" was a customary one given to all agents, unrelated to military rank; at the same time, the honorific conferred a quasi-military gloss to the authority the agent held as the top U.S. official on a reservation.[109] Mathews's brief description imagines the agent as far from authoritative, however. He appears instead as a passive figure, whose actions are not only minimal but happen primarily in reaction to the stimuli around him— "His eyes squinted in the [. . .] sun"; "He lurched [. . .] as the buggy creaked and groaned." The core activity narrated in this episode—driving mules to pull a carriage—happens more or less automatically, without his direct intervention ("the reins held loosely in his hands"; "failing to enforce his commands with a whip"). The position of control that he inhabits simply as a person holding reins attached to beasts of burden is barely exercised, let alone any more elevated assertion of authority. The repetitive voicing of the ineffectual "Giddap" amplifies this sense of automaticity: it is detached from the immediate environment or from clear intentionality on the part of the agent. An instance of passive voice—that the Major's command "was said mechanically"—only further congeals the figure of the agent into a pose of automatic, perhaps even meaningless action.

By contrast, all the humans and non-humans surrounding the agent are far more active, animated, and responsive presences in the episode. The buggy itself appears before the agent himself does on the scene of the novel, moving "like some purposeful bug" across the landscape (19). It projects an almost cinematic dynamism as it pops in and out of view with changes in elevation: "disappearing in a depression," the buggy "would appear again sometime later, and

[109] One historical source on this practice of addressing the Indian agent explains that "it [was] customary to confer the title of 'Major' or 'Colonel' on Indian agents as matter of courtesy" (Peck 491).

remain visible for a short time along a high divide, increasing its speed for a short distance, when the prairie breezes carried off the pale clouds of dust that the mules kicked up" (20). Six Osage horsemen guarding the carriage—which, later in the episode, is revealed to carry a precious and risky-to-transport cargo—are still more oriented towards focused, purposeful intent: "Because these riders seemed to be a part of the ponies they rode, and because they inclined a little forward, they could be identified as Indian. By the fact that they wore roaches with eagle feathers projecting above them, they could be recognized as Osage" (20). The sense of perspective voiced here with regard to the riders' group identities is that of a viewer who knows and recognizes the Osage in terms of the embodied skill of horsemanship. Without probing the psychology of either the white or Native figures in the episode, Mathews uses surface-level descriptions and contrasts to channel a sense of the agent as acting without a strong sense of purpose, and indeed as barely acting at all.

Along similar lines, we might also note that we are not furnished with the phenotypical sketch of the agent that we might expect from a realist novel—his physical appearance isn't mentioned at all, whether as an index to his character or not. Instead, we are confronted with this strangely emptied-out image, including and beyond the language around his operating in a "mechanica[l]" fashion.

Reading the Agent as Modernist Automaton

My focus in this section is reading this imagery by layering perspectives from Native literary studies with studies of European and American modernism. lens of what Beth Piatote calls the

"Indian/Agent aporia": the paradoxical position of the reservation agent as tasked with serving both U.S. and Native interests (Kalter 39).[110]

Piatote's essay, "The Indian/Agent Aporia" notes the ways in which Indian writers of a slightly earlier period, within the Society of the American Indian, understood reservation agents and Indian agency as frequently contradictory, yet mutually dependent co-constructions (53). The power of the reservation agent or Indian agent, as he was often called, was limited by the dictates he received from the Secretary of the Interior and by the parameters of federal Indian policy at any given moment. Yet, in Piatote's words, he also "served as the central mechanism for carrying out treaty provisions" and "as deliverer of federal promises" in carrying out the nation-to-nation agreements encoded in the treaties made between the U.S. and Native nations (56). In other words, as a liaison to the federal government, the reservation agent was a key vehicle—if not the only or best vehicle—through which tribal nations could practically secure the benefits, resources, and sovereign rights designated in the treaties structuring their land cessions and reserved territory. While Piatote's focus is the vexed positionality of Native people holding official posts within the Indian service in the early twentieth century, I find her language of the agent as "mechanism" as useful for thinking about the non-Native figure of the agent in *Wah'Kon-Tah*.

This invocation of the mechanical and the automatic in Mathews's account of the agent also puts his work in line with a strand of literary and cinematic modernism deeply preoccupied with the idea that humans and machines are merging into one. Sometimes the apparition of the

[110] Kalter observes that "[b]y juxtaposing the Major's intrusions into Osage affairs with his self-reported love and understanding of the Osages throughout the novel, Mathews articulates a profound insight into the paradox of the agency system," which pairs intimate understanding of the Indian with control and coercion. See Jacobs and Cahill on the meshing of gender, intimacy, domesticity, and race in white reform discourse surrounding Indians and the Indian service.

automaton would be played for laughs, most famously in Charlie Chaplin's performance in *Modern Times* (1936), where he plays a factory worker driven to a frenzy by his struggle to keep up with the relentless pace of the assembly line.[111] If Chaplin's factory worker fails to become the seamless automaton demanded by capitalism and thereby unleashes his own transgressive energy, some version of the opposite seems to be happening to the Major, if with a different array of power dynamics and pressures bearing down on him (e.g., the hierarchy of the Indian department; the conflicts he experiences between his friendship with individual Indian leaders and his own assumptions about the inevitability of assimilation). It is probably fair to say that Mathews's twist on the automaton trope likely does not anticipate Chaplin's. But for readers of American modernism, it probably evokes broader themes of cultural anxiety and curiosity regarding bodies dissociated from minds and minds divided from within, all against the backdrop of an increasingly mechanized technological modernity.

Discussion about modernism and machines typically centers on a confluence of social shifts and shocks to the foundations of European thought and experience, from psychoanalysis's discovery of the unconscious and psychology's study of habitual behaviors, to an aesthetic preoccupation with the disfigured, dislocated body precipitated by the trauma of the Great War (McCabe 430). Writing of such a "crisis of embodiment," Susan McCabe notes that Gertrude Stein especially took interest in the topic of dissociated, automatic activity.[112] This dwelling in the gap between automatic, reflexive movements and the conscious mind, McCabe argues, "prefigures Chaplin's comedic body, his automaton, jerky reception of shocks" (438-439).

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[111] See McCabe for a detailed discussion of Chaplin's iteration of the automaton and its connection to modernist aesthetics.

[112] One of Stein's experiments was to observe subjects asked to do things intended to disperse their attention, such as read an interesting novel and take dictation at the same time. The resulting text, Stein observed, tended to contain many repeated words and exhibit "not much connected thought" (qtd. in McCabe 440).

Moreover, Stein's work is indicative of a broad avant-garde interest in dislocated, dissociated embodiment that maps onto the traumas precipitated for Europeans and European Americans by the Great War (McCabe 430).

Mathews's version of this modernist topos is at first difficult to relate to the psychological and trauma-based model of cultural work McCabe develops in reference to Stein and Chaplin. The shocks and traumas of removal experienced by the Osage themselves are not at issue for the agent. But, when the novel reveals what the agent is carrying in the buggy, and what the Osage horsemen are so intent on guarding—annuity payments in the form of cash—the means by which the agent can and does actually serve in this moment as a "mechanism" for securing Osage treaty rights and sovereignty become dramatically more apparent. That is to say, we can pick up Piatote's language of "mechanism" to bring insight to Mathews's portrayal of the agent as a modernist automaton. First, the Major's dissociated response to the swaying of the buggy and the pace of the mules connects to the internal tension structuring the role of the reservation agent. This internal tension centers on the agent's positional status as the most direct instrument and mouthpiece for U.S. colonial policy on the reservation; at the same time, the agent are also this "central mechanism" for holding the U.S. to account regarding treaty obligations, as illustrated in the episode concerning the patronizing practice of substituting food rations for annuity payments.

"I was part of the machine": Agents' Memoirs of the Indian Service

Laban Miles's journals were never published as a freestanding text, but there was precedent for doing so, and comparing *Wah'Kon-Tah* to these published examples of reservation agents' memoirs traces the horizon of expectations into which Mathews was writing. One is Lawrie Tatum's *Our Red Brothers* (1899); as his chosen title suggests, he interweaves themes of

Christian brotherhood between whites and Indians with his account of serving, like Miles, as a Quaker appointee to the Indian service. *Our Red Brothers* sets a lofty tone regarding the mission of both the agent and his writings: "to show that 'the Peace Policy,' in dealing with Indians, has proved a great blessing to them, to the government, and to the people of the nation" ("Preface"). Memoirs like Tatum's function both as documents of the agent's dealing with tribes as well as arguments in favor of the reforms of the Peace Policy and an acknowledgement of the history of white people breaking treaties (xi). Similar to Miles's narrative as textualized in *Wah'Kon-Tah,* the Quaker Tatum starts his narrative with an account of William Penn and his harmonious dealings with Indians in contrast to other colonial leaders, who operated "on the adage 'might makes right'" (21). Dissimilar to *Wah'Kon-Tah* are pointed ethnographic interludes in the text, with sections devoted an encyclopedic list of topics like "Polygamy—Marriage—Burning Lodges at Death—Burial—Mourning for the Dead—Killing Buffalo—Buffalo Robes—Indian Camps—Indian Medicine—Medicine Dance" (55). As these topic headings suggest, the text is interested in dispensing ethnographic information in the vein of the exotic, an approach distinct from Mathews's more reserved approach.[113]

First published by the Houghton Mifflin Company in 1910, James McLaughlin's memoir of service as a reservation agent, *My Friend the Indian*, was reprinted several times and was advertised in *The Publishers' Weekly* and other national publications as a "fair-minded" and "just" treatment of the American Indian, full of "thrilling episodes" with "not a dull page in the book." [114] McLaughlin's career spanned service as U.S. Indian Inspector and as agent to the

[113] The modernist poet Mary Austin criticized this aspect of *Wah'Kon-Tah* in her otherwise fulsome review of the book, suggesting that "One regrets [. . .] that Mr. Mathews did not supply out of his own knowledge more of ceremonial interest" (251).

[114] The advertisement for McLaughlin's *My Friend the Indian* in *The Publishers' Weekly* groups it with "New Book on Travel and Sport." Despite its biases, this memoir is considered a valuable historical source about treaty-making in the nineteenth century; see Prucha, *American Indian Treaties* 320-321.

"Sioux at Devils Lake" (Spirit Lake Tribe) and to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. He writes proudly of his efforts to "guide the uncertain steps of a simple people across the threshold of civilization, and help to lead to a realization of the domination of the white man and the impending extinction of their race as an element in the great affairs of men" (2). Yet McLaughlin also wants to assume a mantle of modesty about his role in the project of convincing Native people of their profound lack of world-historical significance:

> I would not be understood as claiming for myself any undue prominence in this work: I was part of the machine organized by the government for the civilization of the Indian, and as a part of that organization I did the work that was appointed to me by such means as I could devise [. . .] To the men of my time was appointed the task of taking the raw and bleeding material which made the hostile strength of the plains Indians, of bringing that material to the mills of the white man, and of transmuting it into a manufactured product that might be absorbed by the nation without interfering with the national digestion. (2-3)

Describing the Indian service as a machine was not itself unusual; Francis Ellington Leupp the Commissioner of Indian Affairs under Theodore Roosevelt, described the Indian service in his 1910 volume *The Indian and His Problem* as "a huge human machine"; and other government agencies may have been so described as well (96) But in McLaughlin's account, the imagery of the machine develops into an extended, florid, and violent metaphor for the process of assimilation. The language of "transmutation" emphasizes the transformative—or viewed differently, the profoundly alienating and dehumanizing—aspects of assimilation. The "transmutation" or transformation of the Indian into "a manufactured product" is imagined as a process of grinding up and making it palatable "with the national digestion" as if it were meat

being processed. The modernist anxiety of dehumanization by numbing, endless encounter with machines and mechanized labor is here imagined as a noble, group effort in which the agent plays a small but active part. Imagining the Indian service as a machine shapes a broader picture of civilization as “the mills of the white man,” imagining the savage state of the Indian as "raw and bleeding material" to be processed for the benefit of easy consumption by "the national digestion." A more violent and gory version of the familiar image of the melting pot or crucible of assimilation, the idea of assimilation via the “the mills of the white man” projects the vision of the Indian service—and the agent as “part of the machine”—into a mechanized futurity.
The Indian can only participate in this mechanized modernity as the object of the machine of assimilation—“a manufactured product that might be absorbed by the nation.”

Scripting the Machine

In this section, I return to the historical introduction to *Wah'Kon-Tah* in order to elaborate on the mechanical nature of the agent. Here, I refer to the historical agent, Laban Miles, by his name in order to index the relative level of historicity (as opposed to fictionality) established by the text around the agent’s historical personhood and presence. This text within *Wah’Kon-Tah* conveys the ambivalences that Mathews locates in Miles as a historical personage, by having him largely speak in his own words: virtually all the text appears to be quoted from the documents that Miles bequeathed to Mathews. It reveals both the genuine and scripted nature of the sympathy and friendship that Miles feels towards Indian, and shows him on many levels to be activating a reform-minded cultural script in arriving at the role of reservation agent.

From the start, *Wah'Kon-Tah* troubles notions of biography as a single, coherent story, particularly when it comes to telling the story of an Indian agent. Rather than embarking on an account of who Miles was and where he was born, the introduction, titled “Major Laban J.

Miles," begins by patching together a series of texts and intertexts:

> In the year 1878 Major Laban J. Miles came to the last reservation of the Osages as their agent. Following is an introduction of himself taken from his notes.
>
> "In commending this little sketch or story of my connection with the Osage Indians, I will say that I can scarcely account for my interest in the Indians, but it started when I was a boy [. . . .] In my school days at the close of the term we used to have dialogue. I well remember taking part in them a number of times, and to me one of the most interesting was the dialogue of the story of William Penn—where he went to talk with the king and the king asked how he was going to get possession of Indian lands and William replied that he was going to buy them of the Indians, whereupon the king returned, 'Buy them of the Indians? You have already bought them of me.' Penn replied, 'Not because you had any right to their lands. . . .' And so the discussion went on. Being a member of Penn's historic church I always took the Penn side of the dialogue." (13)

The patching together of multiple texts I observe here takes place within the first four sentences. They include Mathews's own narration to the "notes" written by Miles, which in turn are internally framed by Miles himself as a "little sketch or story." Discussion of a schoolroom "dialogue" soon follows, which then transitions to "the dialogue of the story of William Penn."

On a basic level, this opening establishes Miles the agent as a biographical subject and as a figure sympathetic to the Indian. But the substance of Miles's anecdote is also consistent with the power dynamic embedded in the historical impulse for white people to "feel right" about the injustices borne by racial and social others.[115] Miles later underscores how his experiences as a

[115] I draw here on Lauren Berlant's analysis of the problem of sympathy as the rhetorical goal of anti-slavery fiction (4). The narrator of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* famously calls the reader troubled by chattel slavery to action thus: "But, what can any individual do? Of that, every individual can judge. There is one thing that every individual can do, they can see to it that *they feel right*" (388).

young man introduced him to the "two sides of the Indian question—the Indian's side and the white man's side" (14). His origin story for taking the Indian's side over the white man's is therefore located specifically in having taken "the Penn side of the dialogue" as a schoolboy—in aligning himself with a prominent early colonist and co-religionist against an English monarch.

Finally, this opening passage flags Mathews's complex relationship to the documentation produced by the historical Miles. Incorporating "an introduction to himself taken from his notes" gives the agent a clear voice in the text, while also pointing to the inherently fragmented nature of the agent's self-accounting.[116] This fragmentation is underscored by the agent's material appearing as "notes" rather than a continuous story or other highly crafted artifact. Rather than priming for a straightforward biographical presentation of the agent's story—a third-person exposition of Miles's own writings—Mathews flags the authorial activity implied on his part in converting the former agent's "notes" into narrative.

This complexity is in turn doubled by the agent's own uncertainty about language and writing as embodied in the fragmentary "notes" and "papers" he accumulates over his tenure. These passages of the novel reveal the agent as composed of texts and scripts, including ones with humanitarian potential (sympathy) and ones that adhere overtly to programs of colonial control and coercion.

Conclusion

Similar to my readings of Bonnin and Johnson, this chapter explores a scenario of colonial expropriation in which abstraction surfaces as a vehicle for conveying a narrow, but

[116] To draw on language from Edward Said's *Beginnings,* which contrasts a religious notion of a single origin with a secular plurality of self-conscious, authorially-created beginnings, we might also say that Mathews begins the novel by revealing Miles's own origin story—his autobiographical explanation for his service as agent—as located not so much in his Quaker sympathies but in a dynamic welter of multiple intertexts and interpretive possibilities.

significant pathway, for indigenous survivance. I have argued that the language of the "mechanical" surrounding the agent's actions in the opening scenes of the novel communicates not simply a critical treatment of Miles as historical figure, but introduces a highly nuanced reflection on the role of the Indian agent in the relations between Native nations and the expanding U.S. The "civilizing" project of reformers in this space—to use agriculture and agricultural machinery as a means to make Indians into Americans via productive labor—in Mathews's handling turns into something else. By imagining the agent through a modernist imaginary populated by machines and mechanisms, Mathews defamiliarizes the civilizing template by portraying it as something not that machines do to Indians but that machines—or people portrayed in a mechanical manner, here the agent—do *for* Indians and Osage sovereignty. The portrayal of the agent as a figure of mechanical action (rather than sympathetic intimacy and advocacy) becomes a way for Mathews to locate Indian agency differently at a moment when the erosion of such was continuing apace.

Reading *Wah'Kon-Tah* as a modernist text furthermore invites a reassessment of discussions of indigenous modernism that tend to center Mathews's 1934 novel, *Sundown,* and the conflicts of identity experienced by his protagonist Chal Windzer, who is crafted "in the mold of the isolated and deracinated metropolitan subject," though the context and sources of his deracination as a mixed race Indian are distinct from that of his European counterparts (Schedler 43). While Christopher Schedler discusses the parallels between Chal and Miles as conflicted subjects (47, 50), the radical turn I locate in *Wah'Kon-Tah* away Miles's subjecthood and interiority constructs Mathews as doing far more than preparing to write *Sundown* in the earlier novel. The narrative texture and innovative imagery of Wah'Kon-Tah shows a Mathews who is more deeply immersed in a greater variety of modernist discourses and forms, from Southwest

regionalism to cultural anxieties about machinery, technology, and the automatic, than has previously been recognized.

Coda

Scales and Surfaces of Everyday Abstraction

In a creative essay in *Art Journal,* "In Conversation with Marie Watt: A New Coyote Tale" (2017), the Seneca artist Marie Watt repurposes the typical question-and-answer format of the journal's published interviews with artists to imagine her dialogue with a fictional creature, Coyote. In Watt's "new Coyote tale," Coyote appears as a transhistorical animal figure who has maintained a busy schedule of artistic collaboration with humans, "working the shaman circuit here in the Americas" (n.pag.) While he describes doing "a lot of work, mostly with Indigenous artists," Coyote is best known to the public for working with the post-World War II German artist, Joseph Beuys, on a notoriously idiosyncratic 1974 performance piece, *I Like America and America Likes Me* (Watt). In this performance, Beuys enclosed himself in the René Block Gallery in New York with a diverse set of props, including a shepherd's crook, copies of the *Wall Street Journal,* and a large sheet of wool felt in which he wrapped himself, cocoon-like, while interacting with a live coyote. Watt explains that in Beuys's artistic vocabulary, "the coyote was a figure that embodied the potential for transformation and the possibility that a European artist might become a Native North American shaman who could restore balance to a politically and ecologically troubled world" (n.pag.) Though she and Coyote share a skeptical view of Beuys's personal mythology of self-indigenization, they are eager to talk about similar materials and themes—wool blankets, ideas of transformation—as they relate to Watt's own practice as a visual artist, especially in her development of the "blanket story" as a signature form.

Watt's "blanket stories" take their final shape as stacks of folded blankets that range in height from a few feet to multi-story monumental works created for museum atrium spaces like that of the National Gallery of Canada (Fig. 3). Regardless of scale, the blanket stories share a basic unit of construction—a blanket folded into a square—which locates "high art" modernist modularity and repetition in a comforting item of "low art" intended for everyday domestic use. They also share origins in a community-based process of collection and collaboration. Watt invites people of all backgrounds to donate blankets, and, if they wish, to share an associated story memory to be recorded on a "story tag" attached to their blanket. When Coyote asks, "why blankets?" Watt responds:

> I'm interested in how blankets are objects that we take for granted, but that can have extraordinary histories. I started scavenging for wool blankets from thrift stores in an attempt to construct totem- and ladder-like sculptures. I noticed that people would respond to the work by associating memories and stories of their own blankets. I like the associations the blanket columns have with ladders between sky and ground—here I'm thinking about Brancusi's *Endless Column*—and in how this form might also reference linen closets and other aspects of domestic life. I also like the association of the columnar forms to the conifers and totems of the Pacific Northwest.
>
> Blankets are also personal to me. In my tribe—I am Seneca, one of the six tribes that make up the Iroquois Confederacy—and other native communities, we give blankets away to honor people for standing witness to important life events. (N.pag.)

In addition to evoking this varied set of indigenous and non-indigenous associations, Watt also describes blankets as "transformative objects," though in a more quotidian sense than in Beuys, being "intimate objects that cover, protect, insulate, nurse, celebrate, and adorn" (n.pag.). She

connects wool blankets in particular with themes of companionship and reciprocity between humans and animals, including the Seneca and Iroquois creation story of Sky Woman in which animals serve "as our first teachers" in learning how to survive and thrive on earth (n.pag.).

I turn to Watt's blanket stories together with her "new Coyote tale" for their collective resonance as visual and literary works with the interests and arguments of this project. From their collocation of high and low arts and merging of the domestic with the monumental, to their undisciplined mixing of sources, materials, and inspirations, blanket stories align with the literary works I study in crafting vocabularies of modernist abstraction to refract the everyday patterns, complexities, and histories of the indigenous ordinary. In this context, Watt's blanket stories inspire me to reflect in particular on questions of scale as they relate to the argument I have been making about how the anticolonial act of abstraction—selling model poles; mapping the reproduction of types; resituating the automaton—introduces a critical layer of distance around the power-infused encounters with difference marking these texts. In what follows, I briefly explore questions of scale in the study of American literature, connecting them with Watt's blanket stories as instances of anticolonial abstraction.

Reflections on scale and surface

I find myself particularly fascinated by these texts and authors' preoccupations with the circulation of small things (miniatures, rumors, little magazines, banknotes) on national and transnational scales that produce large material and political consequences for the life and representation of the localized person or group. If regional texts and the literatures of domesticity have often been considered examples of a "minor literature" that self-consciously addresses itself to small matters of local and familial concern, the texts I study point towards questions of scale

as an alternative to major/minor frameworks for writing American literary history.[117] This notion is consistent with Hsuan Hsu's argument that nineteenth century American literature "responded to the unsettling transnational connections brought on by territorial and commercial expansion by moving readers to identify with spatial scales such as the home, region, city, nation, and globe" (1). Hsu's discussion of scale in literary contexts and genres draws on geographer Neil Smith's concept of "jumping scales"—the active process of creating lines of affiliation across different group struggles and social movements—to underscore that scale-jumping can sustain existing power dynamics, if the capacity to jump scales is granted to some people and not others, whereas "counterhegemonic scale jumping" promotes expansive visions of solidarity without collapsing group histories and differences (13-14). Similar distinctions suggest themselves around my understanding of anticolonial abstraction as an active process of representation and remediation. Works like Pauline Johnson's "Hoolool of the Totem Poles" reflect the power of counterhegemonic acts of abstraction, while Edith Eaton's "The Alaska Widow" tracks the harm rippling outward from an abstracted image of dehumanized femininity. John Joseph Mathews's portrayal of the reservation agent as machine mobilizes a representational vocabulary associated not only with European modernism but with broader cultural images of abjected labor, such as the racialized "machine body" of the Chinese coolie (Hayot 139). In this light, the image of a white man's body instrumentalized in service to a Native nation generates a striking counterpoint not just to common narratives of white-Indian relations but to discourses of racialized labor.

[117] For example, Richard Brodhead writes that "in embracing regionalism, Jewett not only embraced the chief *minor* mode of her time but also constrained her work within boundaries that would ensure its minor status" (167, emphasis in source).

Thinking regionalist and modernist form together allows these locale-specific and group-specific representations to come into view in the same historical and cultural array.

Questions of scale, proximity, distance, and power are particularly salient in Johnson's narratorial self-fashioning as a tourist to Northwest Coast destinations, a position consistent with her individual history as an eastern Iroquois woman working, traveling, and then living in British Columbia. As my analysis of regionalism in "Hoolool" suggests, the position of regional tourist-narrator allows her to model the value of leaving the Indian family intact and thriving in their home place, as the pleasure of acquiring the miniature totem pole increases with distance from the original site; the tourist, unlike the permanent settler, always goes home. This text offers the idea that, while the power to jump scales, like the capacity to travel and buy things for pleasure, is unevenly experienced, small people creating and circulating small things can instrumentalize this power dynamic in their favor.

The acts of anticolonial abstraction in these texts carry broader stakes for the representation of indigenous people and groups. In her study *Writing Indian Nations,* Maureen Konkle argues that the project of nineteenth-century Native writing is "to claim modern time" for Native people (37). On the stakes of claiming modern time, Konkle elaborates that "[t]o claim to progress through time, to argue that Native peoples can and will persist into the future, is to claim political standing and to insist on recognition" (37). My project advances an interrelated argument about a later phase of indigenous representation, with a focus on texts whose core figures bear a relationship to tribal citizenship and tribal nationhood that is unknown, unstated, or indirect. Their positions of profound vulnerability, in the case of the widowed or kinless Indian women imagined by Johnson, Bonnin, and Eaton, or of decentered white masculine power, as in Mathews's mechanized agent, each inflect the form of anticolonial abstraction developed in each

text. Rather than a claim to indigenous modernity that features Native groups themselves progressing through time, however, these texts and authors center the contemporary space of a familiar, everyday modernity—marked by regularly timetabled steamship travel, or the typically furnished middle-class home—that Native people simply inhabit. Whether or not they have direct or sustained access to these machines, technologies, and resources as individuals does not qualify them or disqualify them as moderns; this is a key insight of reading regionalism as a modern form. Instead, it is the simple, surface-level fact of dwelling in and moving through a shared space that shapes their claim to modernity. That this simple claim carries a diverse and complex set of aesthetic consequences for the form of these texts constitutes another type of surface I map in this project.

Blanket stories: surface, scale, and difference

I return to Marie Watt's blanket stories as a material and conceptual form that fuses surface, depth, image, story, and text. One monumental work titled *Blanket Story: Confluence, Heirloom, Tenth Mountain Division* (2013) stands in the Denver Art Museum's Northwest Coast gallery (Fig. 4). *Confluence* is flanked by two late nineteenth-century poles created by the Haida artist John Wallace, a design decision that plays up the formal parallels of the blanket story to the verticality of the totem pole form.[118] Considered as a whole, the installation captures many of the interests of "Anticolonial Abstractions" as a project. *Confluence* binds intimate domesticity to

[118] Like the Wakas pole and Chief-of-All-Women pole I discuss in the first chapter, John Wallace's poles changed hands several times. He first sent them down from Alaska in 1939 for display in a San Francisco exhibition before selling them to a municipal park association in Philadelphia; the poles later entered the museum collections of the University of Pennsylvania before being gifted to the Denver Art Museum in 1946 (Denver Art Museum "Totem Pole").

monumental scale; the multiplicity of story tags, materials, and patterns collected from different people and groups also evokes the "multiplication of domesticities" that Beth Piatote identifies in early twentieth-century Native women's writing. The themes of cross-tribal encounter raised by Pauline Johnson's career and interactions with Northwest Coast Native people find echo in Watt's own biography as a contemporary member of the Six Nations who grew up in in the Pacific Northwest and continues to make her home there (Karsten). The blanket story form also carries the reminder that experiences of scale are relative, varying based on one's distance or proximity to the work or space in question. The image of *Confluence* featured here conveys its monumentality, but like the Haida totem poles around it, one's perception of detail and texture in individual figures and blankets, as well as one's ability to read the story tags attached to many of the blankets, would depend on getting very close.

Watt's own interest in playing with scale, dimension, and materials is captured in many additional works in her catalogue that use the blanket story as an abstractable and highly adaptable form. One notable example is *Blanket Stories: Seven Generations, Adawe, Hearth (Ottawa Sampler)* (2013), which translates a monumental blanket story similar to *Confluence* into the modest, two-dimensional form of the embroidered sampler (Fig. 5). The collocation of high and low marking the full-scale blanket story recurs in a different register as the abstract features of feminized crafts and domestic materials—the repetition of the stitch, the modernist grid of the sampler's plaid foundation—come into view as part of the close relationship between figure and ground, or subject and surface, that characterizes much modern art, especially in the field of painting. Another example of abstracting the blanket story form involved actually destroying the original blankets in the process of casting their shapes in bronze. Watt created this large-scale bronze work, *Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek* (2014),

for the exterior of the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington (Fig. 6). In an essay on her website, Watt describes her choice of material as both "practical" and "conceptual" as a reinvention of bronze's historical use "to make busts of statesmen and military leaders" and turn it instead "to memorialize stories of everyday lives." She underscores that "the corporal object is lost in the casting process—literally incinerated—but is transformed into a permanent marker, a memorial, in its likeness." Not wholly unlike the "wonderful accuracy" captured by Hoolool's reproduction of the full-size totem pole, this abstraction of the blanket story via heat and fire translates the soft surface textures of the community's donated blankets into a hard, durable shape. Incidentally, the arcing, gravity-defying form of this particular blanket story also exists in miniature—as a study for the larger work (Fig. 7). Unlike a typical miniature, a study is not something large that has been shrunken down; it keeps its high art associations, as it serves as a small-scale, experimental form in which the artist works out her ideas for a full-scale work. At only eight inches in height, compared to the eighteen-foot completed sculpture, the study for *Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek* renders the individual blanket units difficult to distinguish, if not nearly unrecognizable without reference to the prototypical blanket story. This experiment with scale traces a route that runs opposite to Hoolool's miniature.

The final set of resonances I locate between anticolonial abstractions in the field of modernist literature and the material abstractions created by Watt center on themes of mobility and migration. In her dialogue with Coyote, Watt explains how the language of transportation and "trek" in several of her works reflects a further set of inspirations:

> As for images of flight, I would attribute that to my dad being an engineer at Boeing, my family's obsession with science fiction, and being raised in the Pacific Northwest and hearing Raven stories told by my friend Roger Fernandes (from the Lower Elwha Band

> of the S'Klallam Indians). There's also a link to the Seneca clan system [which distinguishes bird clans from walking animal clans]. . . . So birds and four-legged animals tie back into the idea of animals as our first teachers, and birds especially (or things that fly) are a way for me to explore the intersection of ancient and modern stories.

The "intersection of ancient and modern stories" about movement and flight that Watt describes here spans a vast range of cultural categories, genres, and local circumstances and knowledges, from the popular science fiction of the TV series *Star Trek,* which she specifically names later in the essay, to modern aeronautics and the confluence of Seneca and S'Kallam traditions across diverse geographical locations and group histories. Whereas Beuys imagined a shamanistic transformation that returned him to a fictive past that he had never inhabited, Watt's work encodes movement, migration, and flight through a contemporaneous array of associations and influences that places the technological everyday alongside a nostalgia for a certain type of space-based futurism and stories shared in interactions among Native people.

Reading and viewing Watt's work in the context of the texts and authors I gather under the rubric of anticolonial abstraction points to the power of mixing and recombining categories, influences, and historical referents as a strategy for representing the indigenous modern. As experiments with scale and surface, intimacy and monumentality, blanket stories claim the indigenous ordinary as the space of high art ambition through the composition and crafting of low art domesticities. In both material and conceptual registers, they stage the cultural and geographic connections, collisions, and confluences marking the scenarios and forms of anticolonial abstraction.

Figure 3. Marie Watt, *Blanket Stories: Seven Generations, Adawe, Hearth* (2013). Photograph by the National Gallery of Canada.

Figure 4. Marie Watt, *Blanket Story: Confluence, Heirloom, Tenth Mountain Division* (2013). Screenshot from the Denver Art Museum website ("Blanket Story").

Works, 1995–present

Blanket Stories: Seven Generations, Adawe, Hearth (Ottawa Sampler)

2013

21 × 11 in.

Reclaimed wool blankets, satin bindings, embroidery floss, thread

Private collection, Bellevue, Wa

Photograph by

Figure 5. Marie Watt, *Blanket Stories: Seven Generations, Adawe, Hearth (Ottawa Sampler)* (2013). Screenshot from Watt's website (Marie Watt Studio).

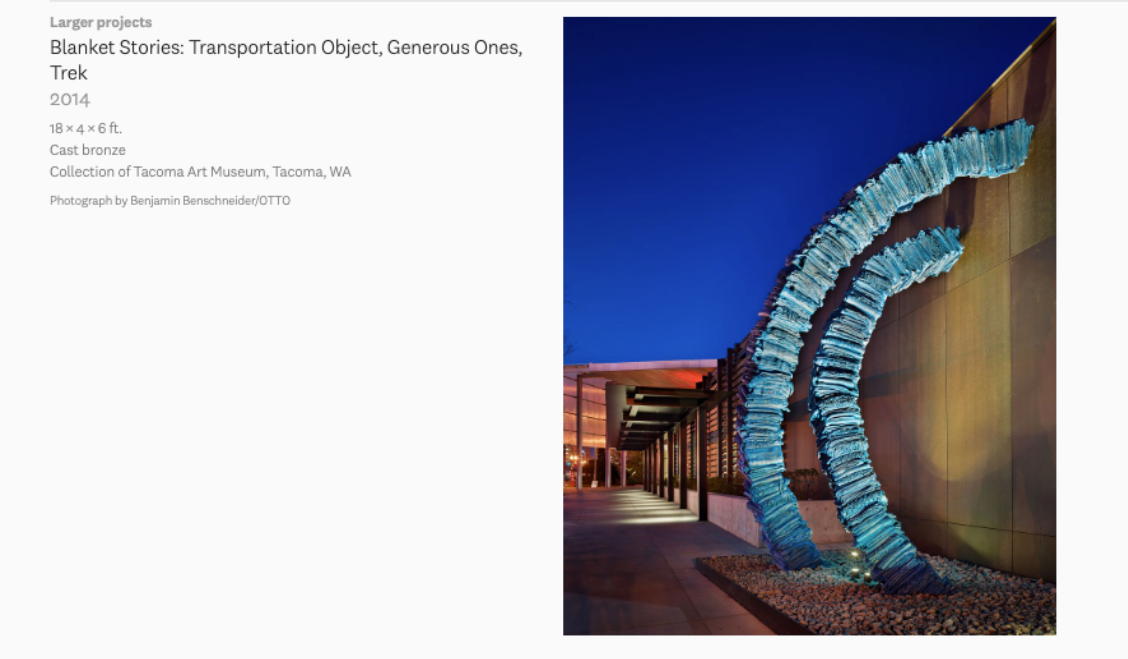

Figure 6. Marie Watt, *Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek* (2014).Screenshot from Watt's website (Marie Watt Studio).

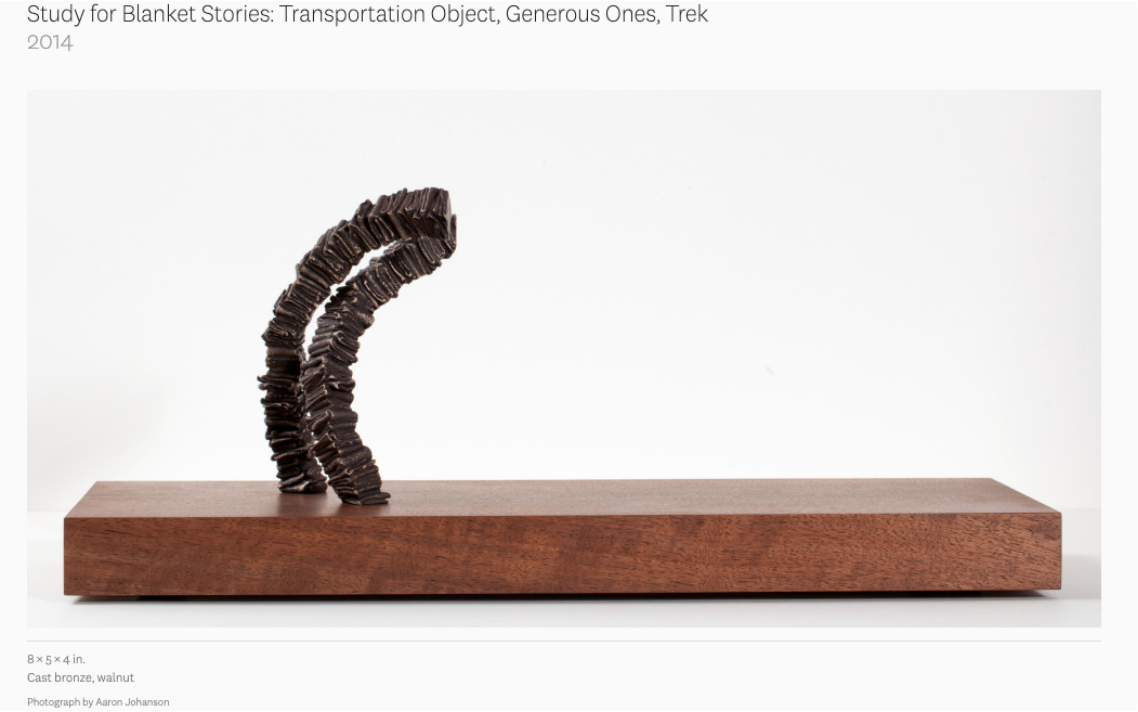

Figure 7. Marie Watt, *Study for Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek* (2014).Screenshot from Watt's website (Marie Watt Studio).

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