

Ann Rinaldi's *My Heart Is on the Ground* as Literary Colonization of Zitkala-Sa's *American Indian Stories*

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Abstract

Colonization of literature and subsequent literary misrepresentation, like so many other injustices perpetrated by Europeans and then Euro-Americans, is a legacy lasting into present day. Stories authored by members of the dominant culture about Indigenous peoples have created a “reality”—that is an appropriation, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in written texts—and have become one of several battlefields on which Indigenous peoples are forced to wage war for the continuation of their lives and authentic cultures. Children’s book author, Ann Rinaldi, continues this legacy of literary colonization with her text, *My Heart Is on the Ground*, in which she blatantly uses and perverts the writings of Zitkala-Sa’s (Gertrude Bonin) *American Indian Stories*, a collections of essays published in 1901.

From first contact, Europeans—initially the travelers and adventurers—began representing Indigenous peoples in written works to other Europeans.¹ The Euro writers filtered Indian reality through their own perceptions and worldviews and came up with a representation that was comfortable for themselves and for the people back home. Not having access to the written medium used by the colonizers at first contact, Indigenous peoples initially created/represented themselves orally only to those Europeans present among

them. They did this by telling their stories, just as we all create and represent ourselves to each other through our stories. Therefore, at the outset Indigenous peoples did not have a voice in the Euro-created representation of themselves to the general European public. This Euro-representation would become the created “reality” for the white, Christian, Euro-American, dominant culture. Literary misrepresentation, like so many other injustices perpetrated by Europeans and then Euro-Americans, is a legacy lasting into present day. Stories authored by members of the dominant culture about Indigenous peoples have created a “reality”—that is an appropriation, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in written texts—and have become one of several battlefields on which Indigenous peoples are forced to wage war for the continuation of their lives and authentic cultures.

What does this mean to colonize a variety of peoples via colonization of literature about them? What is problematic about telling stories about the people one encounters or re-telling the stories that those people choose to share? Colonization via literature is of serious importance. Given, when two cultures meet, each one will represent the other in such a way that is filtered through the other’s worldview. Human beings cannot ever fully escape the social formation acquired from the culture in which they were raised. However, when representatives or members of one culture continually misrepresent, knowingly or unknowingly, another culture in literature (or in any other medium for that matter) and in turn “deny the validity of Indigenous peoples’ claim to existence . . . [to] the right of self-determination, [and] to the survival of [their] languages and forms of cultural knowledge”² by creating a stereotypic image within the consciousness of the dominant culture, then Indigenous peoples are forced to fight for existence, self-determination, and culture by turning the dominant culture’s language into their own (Indigenous peoples’) weapon.

However, prior to discussing Indigenous peoples’ use of traditional story, delivered in the dominant language as a weapon of resistance, it is important to proceed to examine how the dominant culture’s appropriation and misuse of traditional story and history constructs the idea of what it is to be “Indian,” how that idea permeates the consciousness of the general public, and the implications of this particular variety of colonization. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes in her introduction to *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* that the “significance of travelers’ tales and adventurers’ adventures is that they represented the Other to a general audience back in Europe which became fixed in the milieu of cultural ideas. Images of the “cannibal” chief, the “red” Indian, the “witch” doctor, or the tattooed and shrunken’ head, and stories which told of savagery and primitivism, generated further interest, and therefore further opportunities, to represent the Other again.”³ Smith is writing primarily about the implications of imperialism in the area of anthropological research studying her native people (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou) in New Zealand. However, her statements easily apply to the implications of imperialism in the area of literary representation of the native peoples of North America.

According to historian Robert Berkhofer in his text, *The White Man's Indian: The History of an Idea from Columbus to the Present*, early written representations depicted North American Indigenous peoples as noble savages or wild savages, and, looking at contemporary movies such as *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *Pocahontas*, as examples, and books such as the still popular *Peter Pan*, produced by Euro-Americans, those representations still permeate the consciousness of popular culture today. What is the harm of it? Why should it upset Indian people if whites are creating fake Indians for other whites to enjoy? Joel Monture, writer, professor of traditional Native American arts, and working artist, discusses the appropriation of culture in the realm of American Indian art. Monture writes “an individual can observe this activity and shake his head while walking away from it . . . [but] shaking one’s head is not enough.”⁴ There is inherent danger in allowing painful, blatant misrepresentation of culture to happen. Again, turning to Smith, she writes quoting post-colonial theorist Edward Said:

This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, *back to those who have been colonized*. Edward Said refers to this process as a Western discourse about the Other which is supported by ‘institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, *imagery*, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles’ . . . [T]his process has worked partly because of the constant interchange between the scholarly and the *imaginative construction of ideas*. . . In these acts both the formal scholarly pursuits of knowledge and the informal, imaginative, anecdotal constructions of *the Other are intertwined with each other* . . . (emphasis mine).⁵

This point addresses the fact that the Other is constructed by the colonizers through a variety of mediums and at a variety of levels, including the medium of “imagery” and the “imaginative construction of ideas,” and then is delivered both to the general public and back to the colonized. To what end? What is the result of the colonized being inundated with the colonizers distorted view? The answer to this question is the crucial reason why Smith researches and writes about non-Maori anthropologists who investigate the Maori peoples; it is the same crucial reason to research and write about dominant culture-authored texts in contrast to Indian-authored texts. The examples of white-authored texts discussed previously, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *Peter Pan*, and other movies are created primarily for children. This audience is most vulnerable to misinformation—misinformation that introduces and embeds racial stereotypes into the minds of children who then become unconsciously racist adults.

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

Whilst indigenous communities have quite valid fears about the further loss of intellectual and cultural knowledges . . . many indigenous communities continue to live within political and social conditions that perpetuate extreme levels of poverty, chronic ill health and poor educational opportunities . . . While they live like this they are constantly fed messages about their worthlessness, laziness, dependence and lack of 'higher' order human qualities. This applies as much to indigenous communities in First World nations as it does to indigenous communities in developing countries.⁶

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

What is it then, that opposes colonization by way of literary (mis)representation? Authentic (a troublesome word) self-determination and self-creation in the consciousness of the dominant *and* minority cultures in the form of Indigenous-authored literature is what some Indian peoples choose as a weapon of resistance against white attempts at defining and objectifying the North American Indigenous population. Indian-authored texts are not new. As early as 1772, with the sermon preached at the execution of Moses Paul by Samson Occom (Mohigan), Indian voice has been present in American literature.⁷ Writers, particularly Indian women, took up the challenge to fight for the survival of their peoples by authoring their own stories. In an article about five native women who were writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Indian literature specialist A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff writes, "Undoubtedly, these authors and Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), who wrote fiction and nonfiction in the early twentieth century, were stirred to write by events and issues that affected Indians in that period. Indian hopes to resist white domination through force of arms or the messianic Ghost Dance religion ended with" great losses during a number of battles in the late 1880s through to the massacre of "Big Foot's band of Ghost Dancers at Wounded Knee" in 1890.⁸ Instead, these writers, educated in the white man's Indian boarding schools, adopted one of the tools of colonization—literacy—and turned it into their own form of resistance against further infiltration into and appropriation of Indigenous culture.

When Indian peoples author themselves into the consciousness of the dominant culture, they fight the battle to destroy what noted Indian scholar, Vine Deloria Jr., calls the "old comfortable fictions"⁹ dumped on the general public by white authors. Deloria writes, "For most of five centuries whites have had unrestricted power to describe Indians in any way they choose. Indians were simply not connected to the organs of propaganda so that they could respond to the manner in which whites described them."¹⁰ However, there were and are Indian writers who have fought to "recover ground unnecessarily lost during the preceding five centuries."¹¹ In an article titled "Comfortable Fictions and the Struggle for Turf," Deloria describes this as "the struggle for authority

and control of definitions.”¹² In his explanation, he sarcastically asks the question, “Should Indians be allowed to present their side of the story, or will helpful and knowing whites be the Indian spokespeople?”¹³ He continues with what he presumes is the answer from the dominant culture academician. Deloria writes, “Thus Tooker expects to be heard in lieu of the traditional Six Nations chiefs because, after all, she has studied the Six Nations and therefore is entitled to represent them before the public and any other interested parties.”¹⁴ Thus, the implications of texts written by Indian authors is that Indians are wresting the weapon of language and literature out of the hands of whites and are creating an authentic, *uncomfortable* for the dominant culture, projection of self.

An important aside to this, although too complex to be fully discussed in this text, is who is listening? Smith recognizes this part of the equation as well. In her concern about the problem of Indigenous intellectuals “being taken seriously” she quotes post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak, who writes “For me, the question ‘Who should speak?’ is less crucial than ‘Who will listen?’ . . . I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of benevolent imperialism.”¹⁵ In the context of this article looking at the two representative texts, this becomes a very important question and statement. From surfing children’s books websites, it appears that white author Ann Rinaldi is who pre-teens and middle school teachers listen to seriously, despite the fact that she is writing about the Indian boarding school experience over 100 years after the fact and from the position of merely having studied about it. Her portrayal of “Indian-ness” and a tough, but beneficial assimilation by Indians into mainstream American culture at the Carlisle Indian school fits with present-day students’ and teachers’ already inculcated comfortable view of history. Zitkala-Sa’s much more troubling rendition of the boarding school experience, although truly lived and honestly presented, does not fit the comfortable history. It is the authentic uncomfortable that is ignored and/or rejected.

What purpose can be served by putting Zitkala-Sa’s 1900s, autobiographical text in conversation with a piece of white-authored, contemporary fiction for children? The resulting dialogue will show, in a painful and all-too-familiar way, how deeply the Euro-American, stereotypic, “Indian” image is entrenched in the psyche of the popular culture and, much more disappointingly, it will show how that lie is perpetuated. When Ann Rinaldi’s book appeared in print, it was welcomed with rave reviews from teachers, librarians, and children’s book reviewers. In the April 1999 issue of the *School Library Journal: For Children’s, Young Adult & School Librarians*, Faith Brautigam of the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin Illinois writes about *My Heart Is on the Ground* that, “readers follow a remarkably resilient girl [Nannie Little Rose] . . . trying to find a place for herself in a rapidly changing world . . . Captain [Richard] Pratt . . . provides vocational training and field trips, and responds to his students as true individuals.”¹⁶ In addition, Faith Brautigam, writes, “Rinaldi depicts widely divergent cultures with clarity and compassion . . . The period, the setting, and Nannie herself all come to life. An excellent addition to a popular series

[Scholastic Inc.'s *Dear America*]."¹⁷ Clearly, this review shows that Brautigam believes in a historically comfortable portrayal of both Richard Henry Pratt and the assimilationist policies he perpetrated. Reviews from an Indian perspective show that not everyone was so pleased with Rinaldi's historically comfortable fiction. Beverly Slapin—author and one of the founding members of *Oyate*, an organization reading and rating children's books with American Indian characters and themes—writes in an e-mail correspondence:

There are very few "mistakes" in this book. I think that Rinaldi's writing is purposeful and her agenda is racist. In writing this book, and in Scholastic's publishing it and continuing to market it, Rinaldi perpetuates the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and the feel-good mythology that this country did what it had to do—"kill the Indian and save the man," as . . . Pratt often stated. Now, another generation of non-Native kids and their teachers will believe this lie, and another generation of Native kids will have to deal with it. If Rinaldi—or we—were to correct every wrong thing in this book, there would be nothing left of it.¹⁸

Slapin's commentary can be interpreted as representative of the Indian indignation at the publication of this text. She and Marlene Atleo (Nuu-chah-nulth), Naomi Caldwell (Ramapough), Barb Landis, Jean Mendoza, Deborah Miranda (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen), Debbie Reese (Nambè), LaVera Rose (Lakota), and Cynthia Smith (Creek), Indian and non-Indian women, came together to write an historically and academically accurate, very in-depth review of *My Heart Is on the Ground* for the *Oyate* website. As Joel Monture asserted about problems with Indian art, simply shaking their heads and walking away was not enough. In fact, in the review they write, "We do this for our children and grandchildren – Elizabeth, Carlos, Will, Michael, Michele, Stephanie, Miranda, Danny, Robert, Aimee, William, Thomas, Terri, Jamal, Kiana, Rose, Brittany, Shelena, Noah, Kevin, Tyson, Tara, Alexandria – and for their children and the next seven generations."¹⁹

The similarity in their topics is reason enough to put these two texts in conversation with one another. Rinaldi's book, *My Heart Is on the Ground*, is a fictional depiction of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School experience written in diary form for a 9 year-old to 12 year-old audience. The story begins, ostensibly, on December 1, 1879 and includes entries about daily life at the school and remembrances of life before the lead character, Nannie Little Rose, goes to the school. The book ends with a fictitious epilogue of what happened to Nannie after her graduation from the Carlisle school, tracing her life through to age 85 and making up stories about her fictitious children and grandchildren. Zitkala-Sa's text, *American Indian Stories* begins with a collection of four autobiographical pieces called, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," "The School Days of an Indian Girl," "An Indian Teacher Among Indians," and "The

Great Spirit” (formerly “Why I Am a Pagan”). These first three texts tell of Zitkala-Sa’s life before, during, and after her boarding school experience. They appeared originally “in *Harpers* and in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1900 and 1901.”²¹ The fourth essay, rewritten from the original article, “Why I Am a Pagan,” which was first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in December 1902, is a reflection on her experience and an affirmation of her roots as a Yankton Dakota.

However, too much similarity exists between the two works. The topics are similar, but the details depicted are too similar to the point of plagiarism on the part of Rinaldi. Finding an inaccurate portrayal of the boarding school experience is, unfortunately, not surprising, but Rinaldi blatantly took specific historical incidents and specific scenes directly from Zitkala-Sa’s text and rewrote them to create a “history” that is comfortable for the dominant culture. Indeed, the *Oyate* review states “a research specialist on the Carlisle Indian Industrial School,” Barb Landis, “felt it was an outrageous depiction of a tragic period in Native American history.”²² In the scenes that Rinaldi appropriates and rewrites, some are easily traceable to specific parts Zitkala-Sa’s life and writing. Other scenes that are more general descriptions could possibly have been taken as well. From what is contained in her book, it appears highly probable that Rinaldi read, plagiarized, and perverted Zitkala-Sa’s narrative.

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

In Rinaldi’s *My Heart Is on the Ground*, Nannie begins her “die-erie,” in broken English, at the request of her teacher “Missus Camp Bell.” As she very quickly becomes better at writing, her teacher asks her to write about her experiences before coming to the school. Nannie writes that her friend Red Road tells her, “You will see great trees with red apples. You will ride on the iron horse,”²³ if she agrees to go to the school. In Zitkala-Sa’s essay “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” she writes that through an interpreter the visiting missionaries lure her by saying, “Yes, little girl, the nice red apples are for those who pick them; and you will have a ride on the iron horse if you go with these good people.”²⁴ The similarity is evident; the implications of the appropriation need a bit of explanation. In Zitkala-Sa’s text, she uses the imagery of the *white* missionaries luring her away from the Eden of her childhood existence with the offer of “nice red apples.” She turns their own Biblical preaching back on them by eliciting the analogy of the snake (white missionaries) luring Eve (Zitkala-Sa) into taking the apple and thereby losing her spot in Eden (the Yankton Dakota homeland). Zitkala-Sa goes with the missionaries despite the misgivings of her

mother thus taking responsibility for leaving. However, she leaves only because she is a small child vulnerable to the enticements offered by the white missionaries. In Rinaldi's rendition, it is "Red Road," a woman who Nannie regards like a mother, who "convinces" Nannie to go to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School with the promise of apples and a trip on the iron horse. This shifts responsibility from white missionaries to Indian peoples themselves for manipulating Indian children into going to assimilationist boarding schools. Rinaldi takes the scene from Zitkala-Sa and perverts the narrative, colonizing Indian peoples via colonization of the literature.

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

One day I was called in from my play for some misconduct. . . . I was sent into the kitchen to mash the turnips for dinner. . . . I hated turnips, and their odor which came from the brown jar was offensive to me. With fire in my heart, I took the wooden tool that the paleface woman held out to me. I stood upon the step, and, grasping the handle with both hands, I bent in hot rage over the turnips. I worked my vengeance upon them . . . I renewed my energy; and as I sent the masher into the bottom of the jar, I felt a satisfying sensation that the weight of my body had gone into it. . . . I stood fearless and angry. [The paleface woman] placed her red hands upon the rim of the jar. . . . But lo! the pulpy contents fell through the crumbled bottom to the floor . . . I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me.²⁵

In contrast, Rinaldi writes that Nannie is angry not with the white schoolteachers but with another fellow classmate, Belle Rain Water. Nannie writes in her diary, "Today I was so angry, I drove my wooden spoon through the bottom of a jar of turnips. At our table we had no turnips for supper. Everyone likes turnips. I feel bad that I did this thing."²⁶ The similarities in the two narratives suggest that Rinaldi used Zitkala-Sa's ideas and text. In addition, by moving the object of the anger from the white authority figures to a fellow Indian classmate, Rinaldi is once again removing responsibility for emotional distress from the shoulders of the dominant culture and placing it on Indian peoples. Rinaldi re-writes history once again in order to uphold the comfortable lie that the hardships of the boarding school experience were not maliciously

perpetrated on Indian peoples by white authorities but were initiated by Indians themselves.

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

Many parents were coerced into sending their children to these early schools. Many times, children were kidnapped and sent far away to schools where they were kept for years on end. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan described his procedure for taking the children from their families. He said: I would . . . use the Indian police if necessary. I would withhold from [the Indian adults] rations and supplies . . . and when every other means was exhausted...I would send a troop of United States soldiers, not to seize them, but simply to be present as an expression of the power of the government. Then I would say to these people, "Put your children in school; and they would do it."²⁷

In addition, the reviewers point out that Indian peoples went to great lengths to avoid sending their children to the white man's schools. They cite a situation in which a group of Hopi men in Arizona went to federal prison in Alcatraz rather than send their children to boarding school.²⁸

This criticism brings up another Rinaldi re-writing that creates the "comfortable history." It appears from many Indian accounts that families were reluctant to send their children off to these schools. In Rinaldi's fiction, when Nannie is leaving for the Carlisle Indian boarding School she writes in her diary, "The wagon is very full. All the Sioux now want to send their children. Mister Captain Pratt leave some."²⁹ When Spotted Tail comes to visit and wants to take his children home, Rinaldi through Nannie writes that "most of the Sioux children"³⁰ want to stay. When Spotted Tail is told he can only take his own children and not all of the Dakota students, Nannie writes in her diary, "We all knew Max and his three brothers did not wish to go, not even Paul. There was much screaming and crying."³¹ The reviewers from the *Oyate* organization point out that this is blatantly falsified, writing, "according to historical accounts, the scene was just the opposite."³² Quoting Hyde they explain that Spotted Tail found out from a private talk with his sons that they were miserable and had not learned English. He needed "Sioux chiefs and headmen" to get his "four sons, a grandson, a granddaughter and another small boy he claimed as a close relative" out of the school. Pratt was left "guard[ing] the rest of his school, as there were indications that a general stampede for the train might take place."³³ The result is, once again, that Rinaldi's text solidifies the comfortable, dominant culture view of history that the white society was helping Indigenous peoples by offering a positive opportunity for education. Her underlying text appears to be that if

American Indian peoples accepted the kind offering of the white educators, they could then help their fellow people to assimilate into white culture and be productive, white-like citizens. In contrast, Zitkala-Sa does ultimately use her education, but to fight for Indian rights rather than assimilation. An extended discussion of this point follows later in this article.

Rinaldi's depiction of Richard Henry Pratt is also at odds with what Indian accounts tell of his true nature. On many occasions, Rinaldi has Nannie write about Pratt as if he is a benevolent guardian, kindly looking out for the children's best interest—reminiscent of the earlier comment from Deloria on Tooker. In Rinaldi's fiction, Pratt writes letters to Washington to get better clothing for the unfortunate Indians who have nothing but hand-me-downs, threatening to "take ex-tra-or-din-ary means"³⁴ if Washington does not comply. In addition, he is depicted as a friendly, father-like figure: on the Fourth of July, "Mr. Captain Pratt ask[ed] some of the boys to help him set off firecrackers."³⁵ He even lets Nannie's brother, Whiteshield, help him light them, despite the fact that Whiteshield is rejecting assimilation and even does what Nannie terms "war dances" on the school's front lawn. He is so caring, in Rinaldi's version, that when a student, Horace Watchful Fox, dies, "Mr. Captain Pratt wanted to bury [him] in a white people's cemetery in town."³⁶ Not only is this a misrepresentation, according to historical accounts of Pratt, it is damaging in that, from Rinaldi's point of view and from the view of the dominant culture, a white people's cemetery would be infinitely better than the school cemetery, which, in reality was quickly filled with Indian children many of whom "died of illnesses, many died of abuse, and many died of broken hearts."³⁷

Early in her diary, Nannie writes that Pratt "asks Spotted Tail for children to take east to the white man's school."³⁸ Then she says that Spotted Tail "say[s] no . . . [White] people are all thieves and liars. They took all our land. . . . [N]o Sioux children [will] learn such ways."³⁹ Pratt's response, according to Nannie, is to "tell Spotted Tail he is a re-mark-able man. . . . But that he signed papers with the government and gave the land because he not know better. He not edu-cat-ed."⁴⁰ The effect, especially for a 9 year-old to 12 year-old audience, is to make Pratt sound nice and reasonable and Spotted Tail sound unreasonable, silly, and child-like for not realizing that he could have avoided losing his land if he had only been educated; therefore, from a dominant culture perspective, he had to send his children to boarding school if he wanted to avoid losing more land. However, as proven by the situation of white settlements on the lands of the Cherokee nation, among many others, literacy and white education were no defense against land grabs.

In contrast to Rinaldi's fictional representation of Pratt, the teachers who ran Zitkala-Sa's boarding school were not at all depicted as benevolent parents. When Zitkala-Sa and her friends, Judewin and Thowin, are caught falling in the snow when they had been told not to, Thowin is taken into a room by one of the women teachers. Thowin only knows the English word "no" and so is beaten to the point that "the poor frightened girl shrieked at the top of her voice" each

time “no” was not the correct answer, such as when the teacher asks, “Are you going to obey my word the next time?” Finally, when the woman asks, “Are you going to fall in the snow again?” Thowin’s one word works effectively, and she is not beaten anymore.⁴¹ Zitkala-Sa comments, “During the first two or three seasons misunderstandings as ridiculous as this one of the snow episode frequently took place, bringing unjustifiable frights and punishments into our little lives.”⁴² Later in her life, Zitkala-Sa encountered Pratt himself when she decided to take a job at the Carlisle School. She was quickly disgusted with the way that the school was run and did not stay long. When she had her essay “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” published, he condemned it, saying, “her stories were ‘trash’ and she ‘worse than pagan.’”⁴³

In addition to rewriting Pratt into a seemingly nice man bent on helping the Indians through a difficult transition, Rinaldi rewrites history so that Indian illiteracy, rather than white infiltration, bogus treaties, and theft, is to blame for loss of ancestral land. The previously mentioned selection from Nannie’s diary—“he [Spotted Tail] signed papers with the government and gave the land because he not know better. He not ed-u-cat-ed”—is just one of many instances where Rinaldi shifts blame and creates a “history” more palatable to the dominant culture.⁴⁴ In addition, she writes through Nannie that “In The-Time-That-Was-Before, our chiefs have made large mistake in giving over our lands”⁴⁵ and that Nannie will, “Understand their language” because she believes, “If our elders had done this, they would not have signed away the land.”⁴⁶ Zitkala-Sa, however, is very clear about who is responsible for Indian land loss. She writes that when she offers to go to the river for water when she is older and big enough to carry it herself, her mother replies, “If the paleface does not take away from us the river we drink.”⁴⁷ Her mother explains further, “We were once very happy. But the paleface has stolen our lands and driven us hither. Having defrauded us of our land, the paleface has forced us away.”⁴⁸ Zitkala-Sa uses the word “defrauded” to explain the loss of land; however, Rinaldi uses rhetoric to place the blame at the feet of the Indians themselves, manipulating the beliefs of the young, impressionable audience who reads her fiction.

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

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

Part of me is missing. I feel like a young warrior in our Sun Dance, who has had the skin near his breasts cut and sticks put in the openings. The sticks are fastened to two ropes and I am left hanging, to show my bravery.⁴⁹

Miss Monk, who teaches us sewing, said she will send the best ones to the land of Philadelphia to the State Fair. This is like our Sun Dance, only nobody dances.⁵⁰

[O]ne of Pretty Eagle's brothers is ailing. He pledged himself in the Sun Dance. He fasted and allowed the wooden skewers to be put through the skin around his shoulders . . . Many young men do this every year . . . But some also die. And some get sick . . . Many young braves have died from this. I am very worried.⁵¹

Depictions such as these are inaccurate. The reason for pledging at the Sun Dance is not to show bravery. Rinaldi trivializes a sacred ceremony; the Sun Dance is not a state fair. Finally, Rinaldi shifts blame yet again, this time for the deaths of "many young braves" in the Sundance, leading young readers to believe that it is the Indians' own ceremonies that are killing them.

Rinaldi continues to depict Indian spirituality in a trivial manner when she has Nannie write, "We learned about the Devil in Sunday school. I think he is like some of our medicine men. He can change his shape if he wishes."⁵² To have an Indian character equate the epitome of evil in the white Christian world with her own Indian spiritual leaders is unforgivably inaccurate, bordering on blatant racism. Coincidentally, Zitkala-Sa also learns about the Devil when she is at boarding school. Her reaction, as expected, is quite different. The Devil to her is a "white man's legend" that she hears from a "paleface woman" who tells her that he "roamed loose in the world, and that little girls who disobeyed school regulations were to be tortured by him."⁵³ Consequently, she has a dream that she is at home with her mother and the devil is chasing her. Her mother does not seem to notice; the Devil does not frighten her mother because he belongs to the world of whites, and she does not speak that language. Zitkala-Sa runs to her side and is eventually scooped up into her lap; at that instant, the devil disappears because she is now safely Indian again and cannot be bothered by the white man's devil.⁵⁴ In Rinaldi's depiction, the devil is equated with Indian medicine men, reinforcing the stereotype of the "savage red devil." In Zitkala-Sa's more accurate depiction, the devil is a white man's creation that disappears when she is in the safety of her Indian upbringing.

The dream about the Devil is representative also of the terrible split that was caused by the boarding school education. In her literature, Zitkala-Sa writes against the boarding school system and does not advocate it for her people. In "Voices From the Gaps," a University of Minnesota website highlighting "women writers of color," Melessa Renee Henderson, contributing researcher and writer, reports that in 1900 Zitkala-Sa began publishing critical articles about the Carlisle Indian School. She resented the degradation students underwent, from forced Christianity to severe punishment for speaking in native languages. She was criticized for this because many felt she showed no gratitude for the kindness and support that white people had given her in her education.⁵⁵

In the short story, "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," Zitkala-Sa writes about a young Indian boy who goes off to the white boarding school and comes back unable to care for his aging parents because he does not have any of the skills needed to survive. Because of his lack of useful knowledge and because of his alienation from his family and tribe, his people leave him and his father dies of starvation. In his attempt to feed his father by killing a cow belonging to a local white rancher, he kills the rancher and subsequently is put in jail to await his execution. He wonders, at the end of the story, whether he will be greeted by his father or by the white man's Jesus when he dies. Noted scholar, Dexter Fisher, wrote in her introduction to the newest edition of *American Indian Stories* that "The Soft-Hearted Sioux raises the fundamental question of survival that was to confront all Indians educated off the reservation. What price assimilation?"⁵⁶ In an article for the *Cimarron Review*, Vanessa Holford Diana answers, "Clearly, through repetition, Zitkala-Sa shows us that the cost of assimilation is entrapment and isolation and can be death, whether actual or metaphorical."⁵⁷

Zitkala-Sa is clear about the pain that the boarding school experience and the acquisition of literacy affords her. When she returns to her home after three years at the boarding school, she writes, "During this time I seemed to hang in the heart of chaos, beyond the touch or voice of human aid . . . This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East."⁵⁸ Her misery is not hers alone. She observes, "After an uncertain solitude, I was suddenly aroused by a loud cry piercing the night. . . . I realized that my unrestrained tears had betrayed my suffering to [my mother], and she was grieving for me."⁵⁹

Nannie does not seem to have the same issues with assimilation. She mentions briefly and occasionally things such as, "we children [should] not forget our people and our ways."⁶⁰ But, more so and in more detail, she writes statements such as "it is not wrong to be here, to learn the ways of the white man. Learn their songs, their history, their artwork, their religion, so we can make our way in the world."⁶¹ As opposed to Zitkala-Sa's real struggle with identity in two worlds, Nannie Little Rose has an easy handle on it. She writes, "When I first came here I missed home very much. Now I am more at home here. But I have not turned my face from my people. Each day I look in the white people's mirror in the hall and see that I have not lost my face."⁶² In contrast, Zitkala-Sa writes, "Had she known of my worn condition, [my mother] would have said the white man's papers were not worth the freedom and health I had lost by them. . . . [I]t would be far too true to be comfortable."⁶³ The final analysis of the cost derived by the boarding school system is best expressed by Zitkala-Sa in the last few passages of "An Indian Teacher Among Indians." Disillusioned and far from home, she writes:

For the white man's papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit.
For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks.
On account of my mother's simple view of life, and my lack of any, I
gave her up, also. I made no friends among the race of people I loathed.

Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends. The natural coat of bark which had protected my oversensitive nature was scraped off to the very quick.⁶⁴

From the similarity in the passages cited, it appears obvious that Rinaldi read Zitkala-Sa in preparation to write her own book. Concluding that she did read it, she must also have read the previous passage. Given this, how can we believe anything except what Beverly Slapin writes—"There are few 'mistakes' in this book. . . . Rinaldi's writing is purposeful and her agenda is racist."⁶⁵ In colonizing Zitkala-Sa's text, published in the early 1900s and still in print and read today, Rinaldi continues the long history of colonization of North American Indigenous peoples. Just as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow appropriated and distorted Indigenous peoples' stories in 1855 to create Hiawatha and sell him to the public as a "real Indian," Rinaldi, in 1999, appropriates and distorts Zitkala-Sa's Yankton Dakota stories to create Nannie Little Rose and continue the deception. Rinaldi did not make mistakes; she was purposeful. The result of her act of colonization, just as Slapin suggests, is that "another generation of non-Native kids and their teachers will believe this lie, and another generation of Native kids will have to deal with it."⁶⁶

Notes

1. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 8. This text inspired me to use the term "decolonization" in relation to Indigenous authored literature.
2. *Ibid.*, 1.
3. *Ibid.*, 8.
4. Joel Monture, "Native Americans and the Appropriation of Cultures," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan. 1994), 115.
5. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 1-2.
6. *Ibid.*, 3-4.
7. John L. Purdy and James Ruppert, *Nothing but the Truth: An Anthology of Native American Literature* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 620.
8. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, "Early Native American Women Authors: Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Sarah Winnemucca, S. Alice Callahan, E. Pauline Johnson, and Zitkala-Sa," in Karen L. Kilup, ed., *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers: A Critical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 90.
9. Vine Deloria Jr., "Comfortable Fictions and the Struggle for Turf: An Essay Review of *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies*," in Devon Mihesuah, ed., *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 66.
10. *Ibid.*, 66.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 68.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Guyatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 71.

16. Faith Brautigam, review of *My Heart is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose, a Sioux Girl* by Ann Rinaldi, *School Library Journal For Children's Young Adult & School Librarians*, Vol. 45, No. 5 (1999), 141.
17. *Ibid.*, 141.
19. Beverly Slapin, <oyate@oyate.org> "Re: Thanks," 8 April 2001, personal e-mail (8 April 2001). Ms. Slapin was very gracious in corresponding with me and supporting my efforts in writing this and other articles on the same topic.
20. Marlene Atleo, et al, review of *My Heart is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose, a Sioux Girl*, by Anne Rinaldi, *Oyate*, Vol. 17 (November 2001), <http://www.oyate.org/books-to-avoid/myHeart.html>, November 17, 2001. I am deeply indebted to these women for the hard work they did in pulling together and presenting this information.
21. Dexter Fisher, foreword for *American Indian Stories* by Zitkala-Sa (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1921), v. Fisher has done extensive research and has written numerous articles about Zitkala-Sa. This foreword was also printed in the August 1979 issue of *American Indian Quarterly*.
22. Atleo, et al., review of *My Heart is on the Ground*.
23. Ann Rinaldi, *My Heart is on the Ground* (New York: Scholastic, 1999), 27.
24. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1921), 42. Although the collection was published in 1921, the articles that are included were published as early as 1901.
25. *Ibid.*, 59-61.
26. Rinaldi, *My Heart is on the Ground*, 88.
27. Atleo, et al., review of *My Heart is on the Ground*.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Rinaldi, *My Heart is on the Ground*, 34.
30. *Ibid.*, 117.
31. *Ibid.*, 121.
32. Atleo, et al., review of *My Heart is on the Ground*.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Rinaldi, *My Heart is on the Ground*, 109.
35. *Ibid.*, 109.
36. *Ibid.*, 43.
37. Atleo, et al., review of *My Heart is on the Ground*.
38. Rinaldi, *My Heart is on the Ground*, 25.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 58-59.
42. *Ibid.*, 59.
43. Dorothea M. Susag, "Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) A Power(full) Literary Voice," *SAIL*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Fall 1993), 20.
44. Rinaldi, *My Heart is on the Ground*, 25.
45. *Ibid.*, 5.
46. *Ibid.*, 32.
47. Zitkala-Sa, 9.
48. Zitkala-Sa, 10.
49. Rinaldi, *My Heart is on the Ground*, 29.
50. *Ibid.*, 78.
51. *Ibid.*, 127.
52. *Ibid.*, 40.
53. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 62-63.
54. Zitkala-Sa, 62-64.
55. Melessa Renee Henderson, "Women Writers of Color: Gertrude Simmons Bonnin," *Voices from the Gaps*, on-line, Vol. 4, (December 1997), <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/GertrudeSimmonsBonnin.html>, November 17, 2001.
56. Fisher, Foreword to *American Indian Stories*, ix.

57. Vanessa Holford Diana, "'Hanging in the Heart of Chaos'": Bi-cultural Limbo, Self-(Re)presentation, and the White Audience in Zitkala-Sa's *American Indian Stories*," *Cimarron Review*, no vol., No. 121, (October 1997), 164.

58. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 69.

59. *Ibid.*, 74.

60. Rinaldi, *My Heart is on the Ground*, 76.

61. *Ibid.*, 76.

62. *Ibid.*, 77.

63. Zitkala-Sa, *My Heart is on the Ground*, 81.

64. *Ibid.*, 97.

65. Slapin, "Re: Thanks."

66. *Ibid.*