

Strategies of Discourse: Native American Women Characters in Jackson's *Ramona*, Callahan's *Wynema*, and Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*¹

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Abstract

This article treats three novels that present Native American women title characters: Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, published in 1884; S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema, a Child of the Forest* (1891); and Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, the Half Blood* (1927). Jackson is a White writer best known for her activism on behalf of Native peoples; nevertheless, she forges an identity for her lead character that is stereotypical and unrealistic as Ramona learns of her Indian heritage and suddenly becomes Indian in her values and speech. Callahan, a Muscogee Creek writer, creates a character who, however in tune with Muscogee ways in her youth, gradually transforms into a replica of her white, middle-class teacher. Both of these novels present characters who shift between two discreet ethnic identities. In contrast, Mourning Dove, an Okanogan writer, creates a character of both white and Indian heritage who refuses to compromise either identity and who becomes a multi-facted model of mixed blood subjectivity.

Native American women's identities in fiction have necessarily been fraught with complications and contradictions. Non-Native writers have portrayed these

women stereotypically as dirty squaws and overworked drudges. Federal policies enforcing assimilation, whether through boarding schools or land allotment, sometimes countered native women's traditional roles. Lastly, marriage between Native American and non-Native people produced mixed blood children who have been displaced and demeaned by both cultures.

This article addresses three novels that represent Native American women as their title characters. The authors use speech patterns to identify their characters and to illustrate different responses to the colonial imposition of language upon Native Peoples. Ultimately, Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* produces a more complex representation of linguistic identity and of colonialism than the other two novels and devises a notion of multiple subjectivities that is positive and inclusive rather than debilitating and exclusive.

A novel by a non-Native author begins this study: Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, published in 1884. Jackson creates a mixed blood character who learns of her Native heritage during the course of the novel. The earliest known novel by a Native American woman is S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema, a Child of the Forest*, first published in 1891. *Wynema* provides an opportunity to examine the process of assimilation undergone by the Muscogee main character. Lastly, this study comes to the character of Mourning Dove's western novel, *Cogewea, the Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range* (probably completed shortly after World War I but, because of paper shortages related to the war, unpublished until 1927). There would be obvious cultural differences among all three characters that cannot be thoroughly treated here: *Ramona*'s mother belonged to the Gabrieliños, one of the California Mission Indian tribes; *Wynema* is a Muscogee Creek, and *Cogewea* is an Okanogan. Focusing on general aspects of the characters such as how they express themselves in speech, how they feel about their identities, and how they relate to other characters creates an illuminating comparison, however.

Though a poet and novelist, Jackson is best known as a reformer who advocated justice for Native Americans in the non-fiction work, *A Century of Dishonor*. Published in 1881, the book traces the failures of Federal Indian Policy. Jackson's novel, *Ramona*, dramatizes her disgust with the government's attitude toward Indians as it tells the fictionalized story of a murdered California Mission Indian whose band of Luiseño Indians had been dispossessed by white settlers staking claim on their land. Jackson attests that her account was based on a documented event and she overtly criticizes the fact that killing an Indian was considered "justifiable homicide" in California at the time.²

Jackson wrote *Ramona* hoping that it would garner the amount of attention for Native American peoples that Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for African-American slaves. Historian Valerie Sherer Mathes argues convincingly that Jackson's writing brought the racism and disadvantages endured by California Indians to the attention not only of fellow reformers, but also politicians, who "...viewed Indian acculturation as the solution to the

problem.”³ Unlike other reformers of her time, though, Jackson was not driven by Christian piety: “Instead she was driven by something other than a strong Protestant obligation to engage in missionary activities.”⁴

The plot of *Ramona* focuses on the love between the mixed blood young woman Ramona Ortegna and the Indian Alessandro Assis. Ramona’s background is complicated. She is the child of a Scottish father, Angus Phail, and an unknown Indian woman. Her father is said to have married an Indian woman from the San Gabriel group of Mission Indians after losing his beloved, the Señorita Ramona Gonzaga, to another man. Angus seeks his faithless lover twenty-five years later; she is now the Señora Ortegna and she has been left bitterly childless. Since the only other option is for Ramona to be raised by the Church, the Señora agrees to raise the child. When she passes away, Ramona comes to live with the Señora Morena, the Señora Ortegna’s sister. Ramona and Alessandro meet when he is hired as a sheep-shearer on her Mexican foster-mother’s land and their relationship helps her to gain knowledge of her Indian heritage and the injustices done to her people. The character of Alessandro is continually depicted as the noble savage. Señora Moreno reports that one of her hired hands has been amazed at his knowledge, skill, and modesty and she concludes, “I knew not that there were such Indians; surely there cannot be many such,” emphasizing Alessandro’s exceptional character.⁵

Perhaps adhering to such stereotypes allows Jackson to reach a wide audience, an audience of white readers who would accept such stereotypes. The novel itself is thoroughly Victorian in tastes and manners; for instance, the female characters seem to swoon with frequency or suffer from “fevers.” Unlikely plot twists, truly evil villains, and sentimentality further characterize the genre. Notably, though, Jackson undermines the more negative stereotypes about Native Americans. She shows how ridiculous some of these stereotypes are in a scene, in which a white couple from Tennessee save Alessandro and Ramona from a snow storm and give them shelter. The wife exclaims with surprise, upon seeing Ramona care for her baby, “Well, well, she’s fond uv her baby’s enny [sic] white woman!”⁶

Ramona’s appearance is described in a manner intended to evoke the sympathy of white readers. Jackson emphasizes that Ramona is Indian yet not *too* Indian: “She had just enough of olive tint in her complexion to underlie and enrich her skin without making it swarthy.”⁷ For nineteenth-century European and European-American writers, swarthinness connotes evil of character as well as darkness of hue and so in emphasizing Ramona’s medium complexion, Jackson underscores the character’s inherent goodness.

Ramona knows nothing of her Indigenous heritage until she is an adult and, when she learns of that heritage, her main concern is that now she may marry Alessandro without breaking any social customs. However, the Señora will not consent to the union because she believes that Ramona represents the Morenos, even as a foster child: “Of course it would not be right for us to let Ramona do

anything which we would not let her do if she was really of our own blood," the Señora says.⁸

Jackson contributes to the nineteenth-century's interest in Indians as Noble Savages throughout her novel. Alessandro's exceptional character places him within the confines of the stereotype. To this study, it is more important that while Jackson opts to portray an Indigenous woman as a central character, and therefore departs from the masculine stereotype,⁹ the character of Ramona becomes a female Noble Savage rather than a believable human being.

The Señora hopes to bribe Ramona away from Alessandro by showing her the clothing and jewels her sister, the Señora Ortegna, left to her on the event of her marriage to a suitable man. As the Señora reads her sister's instructions, however, Ramona concentrates on immaterial concerns:

She did not look at the jewels. Her eyes never left the Señora's face. At the close of the reading, the Señora said sternly, "You see, now, that my sister left to me the entire disposition of everything belonging to you." "But it hasn't said who was my mother," cried Ramona. "Is that all there is in the paper?" The Señora looked stupefied. Was the girl feigning? Did she care nothing that all these jewels, almost a little fortune, were to be lost to her forever? "Who was your mother?" she exclaimed, scornfully. "There was no need to write that down. Your mother was an Indian. Everybody knew that!"¹⁰

Jackson gives Ramona an innate nobility of character. More concerned with her heritage than with the jewels, Ramona shows that she cannot be bought by the Señora. Moreover, she shows herself to be completely unconcerned with material things, despite the fact that she has lived a life of privilege on the Moreno estate while constantly being told that nothing there belonged to her. Ramona would seem more realistic if she showed some concern for the jewels and acknowledged that she would like to have some things that were legitimately hers. Jackson uses this nobility for a particular purpose as the scene continues:

At the word "Indian," Ramona gave a low cry. The Señora misunderstood it. "Ay," she said, "a low, common Indian. I told my sister, when she took you, the Indian blood in your veins would show some day; and now it has come true."¹¹

The Señora assumes Ramona cries out in shame upon hearing that she is half Indian; the reader knows that Ramona is both surprised and glad because her parentage legitimizes her love for Alessandro. Jackson therefore uses this scene to show that Ramona's love for Alessandro is sincere and that she harbors none of the racial prejudice that the Señora does.

The most significant aspect of Ramona's character is the implication that she is a "natural" Indian. Conflating genetics and culture, race and ethnicity, Jackson portrays her half-blood character as innately aware of Indian values and mores. Alessandro has always suspected Ramona was Indian, shown in the following scene:

"I think, Alessandro, I have more of my mother than my father." "Yes, you have, my Señorita," replied Alessandro, tenderly. "After I knew it, I then saw what it was in your face had always seemed to me like the faces of my own people."¹²

Since it takes knowledge of Ramona's parentage for Alessandro to fully recognize her Indian features, it is patent that those features are not simply physical features that would be obvious to any viewer. Rather, they are attitudes or expressions that supposedly more subtly convey Ramona's Indianness.

Ramona's Indian self becomes more apparent when she and Alessandro hide out for a few days in a canyon. She easily appreciates the natural details that surrounds her and she waxes poetic about the plants, the sun, the sky:

"What millions of things grow here, Alessandro! I did not know there were so many. Have they all names? The nuns taught us some names; but they were hard and I forgot them. We might name them for ourselves, if we lived here. They would be our relations." . . . "I cannot believe that it is but two days I have lived in the air, Alessandro. This seems to me the first home I have ever had. Is it because I am Indian, Alessandro, that it gives me such joy?"¹³

Since Ramona has lived a life of privilege in two wealthy, Spanish households, the reader might expect her to disdain life on the run, out in the wild. She has never, until now, slept on the ground. She has never had to forage for food. Instead of being uncomfortable, though, she easily takes to life with nature and her appreciation of it marks her attitude as Indian rather than White. She even innately knows the saying common to many tribes that "we are all related."

If her discovery of the natural world seems a bit unrealistic, more so is her innate understanding of the Indian language. Having reached Alessandro's village of Temecula and found it razed by Americans taking ownership of the land, the couple must change their plans. They meet up with a woman Alessandro knows who is grieving for her husband and child. Alessandro leaves the reluctant Ramona with Carmena while he does business nearby. When he returns, he is amazed by what he learns:

"Except for Carmena, I should have ridden after you half an hour ago," continued Ramona. "But she told me to wait." "She told you!" repeated

Alessandro. "How did you understand her speech?" "I do not know. Was it not a strange thing?" replied Ramona. "She spoke in your tongue, but I thought I understood her. Ask her if she did not say that I must not go; that it was safe to wait; that you had so said, and you would soon come. Alessandro repeated the words to Carmena. "Did you say that?" he asked. "Yes," answered Carmena. "You see, then, she has understood the Luiseño words," he said delightedly. "She is one of us." "Yes," said Carmena, gravely, "she is one of us!"¹⁴

Alessandro does not suggest that Ramona has understood Carmena's tone and gestures, which might be universally understood; he asserts that she has understood the language itself. Ramona is therefore revealed as truly Indian.

Similarly, her treatment of an elder woman from his village pleasantly surprises Alessandro. In a new village where some of the Temecula Indians have settled, the elder asks to see the "beautiful stranger" who has arrived.¹⁵ She is so old that she must be wheeled in a hand-barrow to meet Ramona. While just any stranger might feel unease when faced with this decrepit woman, Ramona does not:

There was something scarcely human in the shrivelled [sic] arm and hand outstretched in greeting; but Ramona took it in hers with tender reverence: "Say to her for me, Alessandro," she said, "that I bow down to her great age with reverence, and that I hope, if it is the will of God that I live on the earth so long as she has, I may be worthy of such reverence as these people feel for her." Alessandro turned a grateful look on Ramona as he translated this speech, so in unison with Indian modes of thought and feeling.¹⁶

The meeting culminates with Ramona asserting that "I will go and see her every day . . . she shall be like my mother, whom I never saw."¹⁷ Unconsciously, she recognizes that elders are to be treasured and treated with the utmost respect in Indian culture. Her innate sense of this particular belief is surprising, given that she has had few positive experiences with her elders in the Moreno household, ruled by the tyrannical Señora. Her reverence for the Morenos' priest, Father Salvidierra, might be correlated to her feelings for the Indian elder, but in the Morenos' attitude could be attributed to his religious title, not merely his age.

In the domestic sphere, Ramona also shows a natural knowledge of Indian culture. She tells Alessandro that he should not buy one of the baskets which she has admired so much in the village:

"No. Do not buy one," she exclaimed. "I wish everything in our house to be made by ourselves." In which, again, Ramona was unconsciously

striking one of the keynotes of pleasure in the primitive harmonies of existence.¹⁸

Though this decision may be unconscious, it demonstrates Ramona's realization of her mixed-blood heritage, which is, necessarily, retrospective. She has turned from living one kind of life to living a completely different one and this shift is justified by new knowledge of her heritage.

Though Ramona has these innately "primitive" sensibilities, she also has innately middle-class ones, despite the fact that she has been raised in an upper-class household near the top of the social hierarchy and now finds herself living at the bottom. The home she has set up affords Alessandro much pride when Father Gaspara visits the village:

Seldom in his life had Alessandro experienced such a sense of gratification as he did when he led Father Gaspara into his and Ramona's bedroom. The clean whitewashed walls, the bed neatly made, with broad lace on sheets and pillows, hung with curtains and a canopy of bright red calico, the old carved chairs, the Madonna shrine in its bower of green leaves, the shelves on the walls, the white-curtained window—all made up a picture such as Father Gaspara had never before seen in his pilgrimages among the Indian villages.¹⁹

Writing as she does in the late nineteenth century, Jackson and her audience would have been familiar with the cult of domesticity. With the elevation of housekeeping to sanctimonious heights, homes and the private sphere, were now seen as refuges from the public sphere that men must inhabit on a daily basis. The middle-class family of the United States was established between the Revolution and the 1830s during a time when homes were becoming larger and more ornate:

Such capacious homes, or even more modest imitations, gave middle-class women an important base of operations. They also needed attention. Even with a servant or two, another requisite of middle-class lifestyle, housewives had to prepare meals, preserve food, clean rooms, and wash clothes, all without benefit of indoor plumbing; laundry was done in tubs heated on the stove. Standards of housekeeping rose as well. The home, its furnishing, and its upkeep symbolized the family's level of harmony, virtue, and achievement.²⁰

This is the era when "Cleanliness is next to godliness" comes into vogue. Women were still responsible for domestic duties; those duties simply had been infused with moral implications. Jackson also has a White woman character comment upon the middle-class perfection of Ramona and Alessandro's home.

A White family takes them in during a snowstorm and her family and the couple travel together and eventually settle down. Aunt Ri (the same woman who comments upon Ramona's love for her baby), uneducated but good-hearted, makes it seem as if Ramona has put together a household out of thin air as she describes it to her husband:

"It beats all I ever see, the way that Injun woman's got fixed up out er nothin'. It ain't no more 'n a hovel, a mud hovel, Jos, not much bigger 'n this yer tent, fur all three on 'em, an' the bed an' the stove an' everythin'; an' I vow, Jos, she's fixed it so't looks jest like a parlor!"²¹ [sic]

A parlor would certainly be a middle-class feature of a home and so Aunt Ri unwittingly also makes the connection between virtue and middle-class housekeeping. This lower-class family has not been blessed with domestic bliss, and Jackson says so: "Dimly they recognized the existence of a principle here which had never entered into their life."²² Ramona and Alessandro, with their middle-class lifestyle, are clearly superior to this American family.

The picture of domestic bliss Jackson creates for Ramona and Alessandro seems hardly realistic. Ramona has left the Moreno household in the middle of the night, taking only what she could carry. The couple has very little money. While whitewash for the walls and much of the furniture could be made with their own hands, the canopied bed and lace sheets seem more at home in a typical Victorian household. Since Jackson wants her readers to sympathize with Ramona and Alessandro, she gives her readers this view of the household because contemporary readers will associate the description of the house with the characters' morality; their home reflects their "level of harmony, virtue, and achievement."

The forbidden romance between Ramona and Alessandro takes up one half of the novel, and at times overwhelms the social issues that drove Jackson to write the novel. Jackson does not ignore those issues, however. The band from the village of Temecula, which Alessandro and Ramona have joined, continue to be dispossessed at every turn. Increasingly poor, increasingly frustrated, and having lost a child, Alessandro begins to have delirious moments, to lose his way, and to mistake others' herds of sheep for his own. In one such delirium he mistakenly takes a horse from a white man's corral—leaving his own behind—and rides the horse home. When the owner of the horse finds him, he shoots Alessandro without giving him an opportunity to explain.

Jackson's novel does much to convey the injustices done to Indigenous Peoples. The focus of this argument is on Ramona in order to convey the particular notions of American Indian expression to which Jackson conforms. Ideologically, her half-blood character conforms to a specific notion of identity with European origins.

During the Enlightenment, Rene Descartes made his famous statement, "I think, therefore I am." Thus develops the Cartesian notion of identity: the individual is separate from all other individuals, complete and whole within himself.

Descartes "I" assumes itself to be fully conscious (nothing can be more false, he tells us, than dreams), and hence fully self-knowable. It is not only autonomous but also coherent; the concept of another psychic territory, in contradiction to consciousness, is unimaginable.²³

Jackson adheres to this notion of identity in creating her character—Ramona. When Ramona finds out that she is Indian, her "true" identity emerges and she naturally speaks and acts as Jackson supposes an Indian woman would. Ramona never lapses into older beliefs or behaviors while living with Alessandro. She never longs for the comforts of wealth. She has found her true self.²⁴ The notion of identity that Jackson portrays in *Ramona* is both "autonomous" and "coherent."

Similarly, Muscogee Creek writer, S. Alice Callahan, portrays an identity shift for the main character of her novel, *Wynema, a Child of the Forest*. Callahan uses her character's speech to depict the differences between the young Wynema before she begins schooling and the mature, literate Wynema.

In her introduction to the new edition of the novel, A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff points out the different dialects that intertwine in the dialogue:

Callahan uses varied language and dialect to depict full-blood Muscogees in the novel. She first introduces Wynema and her father, Choe Harjo, in a scene in which they undoubtedly converse in Muscogee. To demonstrate their fluency and literacy in that language, Callahan renders this dialogue in fairly formal, grammatical English.²⁵

The conversation to which Ruoff refers takes place upon Wynema and her father visiting a school and sounds like this:

"Father," she said, "let me stay here and listen always; I want to know all this the pupils are talking about." "No, my child," answered her father, "your mother and I could not get along without you; we can build you a school at home, and you may stay there and listen."²⁶

In a novel written in English, this conversation serves to portray the fluency of native speakers in Muscogee. To contrast Wynema's Muscogee speech with her early attempts at conversation in English, Callahan uses dialect. As stated by Ruoff, Gibson, who used this Muscogee dialect in his satire, called it "este charte" or "red man" English.²⁷

Callahan primarily reserves dialect for young Wynema's conversations with [the white characters] Gerald and Genevieve. She uses Wynema's dialect to indicate both her limited knowledge of English as a child and her youth.²⁸

Both Wynema and her mother initially speak this "este charte" dialect, as when the mother explains the importance of the green corn festivities to Genevieve: "We go busk 'nigh. Eferypoty, no school, you go—nopoty stay [sic] with you—all go busk."²⁹

When she first begins going to school, Wynema speaks English in short, choppy sentences. She asks her teacher, Genevieve Weir (whom she calls "Mihia," "teacher" in Muscogee), "you talk to God?" when she sees her praying.³⁰ Her English retains either childlike or Muscogee pronunciation when she shows Genevieve one of her favorite foods: "Oh, Mihia! It is blue dumpling. I luf it. Do you luf it?"³¹ Though her pronunciation remains the same as in this example, she later learns to make distinctions between similar English words. When the missionary Gerald Keithly visits, Wynema tells him how much she cares for her teacher: "I luf her, for she is so good."³² He asks if Wynema loves him and she replies, "I *like* you; I *luf* Mihia."³³

The reader is only told that "Years passed on"³⁴ for both Wynema and her teacher. Thus the changes in Wynema's speech indicate her maturity as well as her education. This compression of time makes Wynema's speech change abruptly for the reader. She suddenly speaks English with more flair than before. During another visit, Gerald Keithly, now in love with Genevieve, asks Wynema if she knows why he is visiting. Wynema answers, "Why, to see us to be sure—Mihia I mean," she said in a lower tone. "It does not take great perceptive faculties to know that."³⁵

The non-Native characters are represented as speaking very stilted English: Genevieve calls writing "chirography"³⁶ and Gerald teasingly calls Wynema "Miss Superlative Adjective" simply because she sees a fountain when she travels to Keithly College and calls it "beautiful."³⁷ They also tend to use Indian words self-consciously, and, one might argue, with a total lack of cultural sensitivity. The adult Wynema's husband Robin "laughingly" calls his wife and daughter "the squaw and papoose."³⁸

In imitation of her teacher, Wynema's formal English sounds similarly stilted. While flirting with Genevieve's brother, she says she is afraid to reveal their courtship to his mother because "I should feel criminal to think I had come down here and stolen you away like a wolf steals away a lamb."

"Am I very like a lamb, dear?" Robin asked mischievously to divert her thoughts from so solemn a channel. "No," she answered; "you are more like a scape-goat; but I should not compare you to either; you are more on the bruin order."³⁹

When Wynema becomes educated she sounds more and more like her teacher; she never lapses into older speech patterns. While some of Wynema's changes reflect her age—it would not make sense for her to continue to speak in childlike speech patterns—her maturity does not account for all. Ruoff says that, “The girl’s Muscogee-style English disappears forever on the page where she and Genevieve discuss her proposed trip to the teacher’s Southern home.” Such an abrupt and total change makes Callahan’s character similar to Jackson’s, even though one is created by a Native American woman and the other is not. Wynema has moved from being a Muscogee Indian girl to being more like a White, middle-class woman: she emulates her white teacher, she marries a white man, and she takes this white man’s name in contradiction to the matrilineal traditions of Muscogee culture.

Notions of Cartesian identity still prevailing in the literature of the nineteenth century were gradually replaced by notions postulated by postmodernist scholars. They favored the term “subjectivity” to express the complexity, diversity, and contradictions that Descartes’ autonomous self denies:

The category of the subject thus calls into question the notions both of the private, and of a self synonymous with consciousness. It suggests that even desire is culturally instigated, and hence collective; and it de-centers consciousness, relegating it (in distinction from the preconscious, where cognitive activity occurs) to a purely receptive capacity. Finally, by drawing attention to the divisions which separate one area of psychic activity from another, the term “subject” challenges the value of stability attributed to the individual.⁴⁰

Influenced by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida and other postmodern scholars have questioned what Derrida calls “Western metaphysics” to show how such totalizing labels as “identity” actually name fragmentary and unstable realities. In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault “call[s] into question the values of autonomy and stability which define the position of the individual within what is commonly called the humanist tradition.”⁴¹ An individual does not have a fixed identity, but rather inhabits many different “subject positions” in the course of a lifetime and even in the course of a day. This notion of selfhood is freeing, for it necessitates shifting and sliding among different roles. No one is truly consistent in his or her identity, one might say.

While both Ramona and Wynema shift from one discrete identity to another, those identities, whether Indian and white, or traditional Indian and educated Indian, are mutually exclusive. Jackson asserts Ramona’s “true” identity and Ramona seems to “become” an Indian with the new knowledge of her parentage; Callahan creates a character who leaves the Muscogee language, and thus much of her Muscogee identity behind, and makes it clear that Wynema wants

to be an educated, middle-class woman. Keeping in mind the drastic turns these characters take, the next character under discussion here seems truly radical because she never claims just one identity.

Cogewea, the Half-Blood, by Mourning Dove, depicts a central character who is “Of mixed blood . . . ; a ‘breed’!—the socially ostracized of two races.”⁴² Cogewea has been educated at both a convent school and Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, two assimilationist institutions.⁴³ As an adult, Cogewea lives at the “H-B Ranch” with her oldest sister and her White husband-in-law. Cogewea initially regards her future bleakly because of her mixed heritage:

She had struggled hard to equip herself for a useful career, but seemingly there was but one trail for her—that of mediocrity and obscurity. Regarded with suspicion by the Indian; shunned by the Caucasian; where was there any place for the despised breed!⁴⁴

The plight of the mixed blood individual is a common theme in Native American literatures. Stereotypically, the mixed-blood is torn by conflicting allegiances, despised by both Anglo-Americans and Indians, and often comes to a bitter end. If that individual is a woman, she is doubly damned for being what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “a second-class member of a conquered people.”⁴⁵

Cogewea is a very different character from the stereotypical half blood who cannot cope with any ambiguity of identity, however. Far from being deprived of opportunity, Cogewea decides that she has double the opportunities of either a white woman or a full blood woman when the Fourth of July festivities bring horse racing to the range:

“Say, Jim! I’ll ride the Star in the squaw race,” exclaimed the girl in elation. “I’m part Injun and can participate in that as well as in the ladies race. They can’t stop me from riding in both races, can they? If there’s any difference between a *squaw* and a lady, I want to know it. I am going to pose as both for this day.”⁴⁶

The other riders in the ladies race protest her inclusion but she stands her ground.

Cogewea wins the “ladies race” but then, in addition to riding a different horse in the “squaw race,” she buys a buckskin dress and paints her face so that she will not be recognized entering both races. Her purchase of the dress and the fact that “The Indian children saw and giggled among themselves” suggest that Cogewea is playing a role.⁴⁷ Rather than exposing her Okanogan identity, she is putting on a commodified, pan-Indian identity for show.

Cogewea’s complex subjectivity is apparent in the multiple identities for which she is maligned: Indian, half blood, female. She must always contend with negative representations of her identities and she must always negotiate who

she is and how to justify which category she chooses to portray at a particular moment. However, most important to this study is that Cogewea is always white *and* Indian and she resists others' attempts to confine her to a single category. Alfred Densmore⁴⁸ thinks that Cogewea can and should eradicate her Indian self: "Why should you care to remain exclusively Indian? What is the incentive?"⁴⁹ Densmore believes that Cogewea's ethnic identity is a mere choice. But Mourning Dove does not align such notions of racial exclusivity with white culture only. She has Cogewea's grandmother mirror Densmore's attitude toward race when she asks that Cogewea deny her white heritage: "The grandchild is not full Shoyahpee. She is only half! She must forget her white blood and follow after her Okanogan ancestors."⁵⁰ Though the grandmother is a wise and sympathetic character, her advocacy of denial shows that she does not know what is best (or even possible) for Cogewea. She is right to warn her granddaughter about Densmore but she cannot sympathize with her half-blood status.

Frequent, noticeable shifts take place in Cogewea's speech that show the complexity of her subjectivity. When she speaks to her grandmother, Cogewea fluently mixes English and Salish words and infuses her speech with metaphor, for instance, defending Densmore:

"My grandmother," spoke Cogewea after due silence, "do not mistrust me. I have not wronged in dealings with this Sho-yah-pee. I do not forget your counseling of other suns. I will always remember and I may stumble, but I shall never fall."⁵¹

In another mode of speech, she shows her education when arguing with Densmore about the fate of Indians. He believes that traditional ways of life must pass and she comments directly upon his ignorance:

Such density is excusable, since your sojourn has been in the North-country, for not one in twenty thousand of true citizenry are informed on the "Indian Problem," past and present. Partisan writers have chronicled the story of conquest, and political stranglers see to it that the public is kept blinded to actual conditions.⁵²

In contrast to the vocabulary demonstrated above, Cogewea often uses range slang like the cowboys she befriends at the ranch. Proposing a ride with Densmore, she seems a different woman through her speech:

"Guess we're on our way somewhere. S'pose we got to Buffalo Butte, my favorite roostin' place. There is something that always draws me there." . . . "Then come along, Mr. Shoyahpee; for we are goin' do a little ridin'! The spirits are callin' and I dare not lag."⁵³

Far from being flaws in the novel, these shifts are, according to Martha Viehmann, part of Mourning Dove's characterization of Cogewea: "Cogewea's command of Salish, range slang, and proper English brings to life her indeterminate status. Her tendency to switch rapidly from one form of speech to another shows the moody character with which Mourning Dove endows her and her inability to choose between two different ways of life."⁵⁴

While Viehmann accurately assesses the varied roles Cogewea plays, to say that the different speech patterns reveal mere moodiness or an inability to choose trivializes Cogewea's character. The shifts in speech demonstrate the different subject positions that Cogewea *embraces*. Thus, when she speaks Salish to her grandmother and then easily switches to the range slang, she actively participates in all facets of her character and reveals an admirable ability to shift among different positions as the need arises or as she desires.

Despite the limitations her criticism places on the character of Cogewea, Viehmann describes Mourning Dove's manipulation of the Western romance genre in terms quite similar to those used in this study to describe Cogewea herself, emphasizing shifting identities and overlapping boundaries:

Mourning Dove transforms the western romance formula, creates a heroine based on a humorous figure from Okanogan folklore [the mischievous Little Chipmunk, Cogewea's namesake], and plays with the boundaries between Native and European American, between mixed bloods and full bloods to create a powerful novel that, in spite of its flaws, challenges conceptions of the half blood and of Native American literature.⁵⁵

Viehmann must acknowledge, however, as well as all critics of *Cogewea*, that the end product is a collaboration between Mourning Dove and Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, a white acquaintance who was sympathetic to the tribes.

Marked differences in style and emphasis characterize each author's contributions to the book and add another dimension, another voice, to the already complicated narrative. From one perspective, McWhorter could be said to have taken over—colonized—the text and shaped it to his own purposes. In the Introduction to the University of Nebraska Press edition, Dexter Fisher comments:

Throughout the novel there are many such passages in which the language is stiff, formal, and highly rhetorical... Such passages are particularly obtrusive in contrast to the Okanogan tales told by Cogewea's grandmother, which seem to reflect Mourning Dove's own unadorned style.⁵⁶

The highly formal style becomes apparent when Cogewea argues with Densmore in the passage quoted above. Viehmann's opinion, however, is that the collaboration enriches the text.

The result of the collaboration of a white man sympathetic to his Native American neighbors and an Indian woman operating between the two cultures is a multivoiced text reflecting different approaches to the material and to the audience. A notable difference between Mourning Dove and McWhorter is that she has strong faith in the power of stories (or fiction) to sway readers to her point of view, whereas he places his faith in the power of historical facts. Where Mourning Dove included dramatic vignettes of western life and incorporated Okanogan folktales into the novel, McWhorter added footnotes and arguments against the Indian Bureau.⁵⁷

By showing two different approaches to the material and by representing two different cultural perspectives, Mourning Dove and McWhorter create a true narrative of "mixed descent." In this designation, Viehmann draws on Gerald Vizenor's term from *Earthdivers*, "a strategy of discourse that promotes transformation" and that "undermines . . . 'terminal creeds,' that is, fixed, dogmatic beliefs or modes of expression that do not allow for ambiguity or change."⁵⁸

The novel can be further validated as a multi-voiced text by considering how the novel portrays Cogewea's experiences with racism and sexism. Readers frequently mention the ways Cogewea is maligned by unsympathetic characters in the book and Mourning Dove makes it apparent that the mixed blood woman does not have an easy life. That is the extent of the stereotype of the tragic mixed blood, however, in her novel. Cogewea's unflagging characteristic is her ability to speak the very "discourse that promotes transformation" and to be not a tragic mixed blood, but a character of mixed descent in the fullest sense.

Some Native American women would argue that inconsistencies and conflict are endemic to being a Native American woman in the twentieth century. Paula Gunn Allen describes the different views of womanhood to which she was exposed growing up in Laguna Pueblo. On one hand was the instruction she received from her Laguna mother: ". . . I was supposed to be strong and balanced to be a proper girl."⁵⁹ On the other hand were the expectations for women's behavior brought to the Americas by Europeans: "When I am trying to get non-Indian approval, recognition, or acknowledgment . . . my 'weak sister' emotional and intellectual ploys get the better of my tribal woman's good sense."⁶⁰ Allen adds, "Nor is my contradictory behavior atypical. Most Indian women I know are in the same bicultural bind: we vacillate between being dependent and strong, self-reliant and powerless, strongly motivated and hopelessly insecure"⁶¹ and that "We act in . . . destructive ways because we suffer from the societal conflicts

caused by having to identify with two hopelessly opposed cultural definitions of women."⁶²

Certainly, dealing with two different definitions of what it means to be a woman contributes to Cogewea's shifts in expression and contribute two additional subject positions to the ones already mentioned: white, Indian, cowgirl. Cogewea suffers in the course of the novel but recovers; ultimately, she negotiates these varied subject positions with admirable flair.

Notes

1. Antoinette May, ed., *The Annotated Ramona* (San Carlos: Wide World/Tetra, 1989), 203.
2. Though Jackson demonstrated the power of an individual woman to stand up against public opinion, Mathes does not shy away from detailing this woman's limitations as well. For instance, she cites the following problem with Jackson's approach: "[S]he was more of a muckraker than a missionary reformer." Valerie Sherer Mathes, *Helen Hunt Jackson and Her Indian Reform Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 81. Furthermore, those who study Jackson are reminded frequently how different were the reformers of the nineteenth century from the proponents of Indigenous sovereignty today.
3. Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona* (New York: Signet, 1988), 64.
4. *Ibid.*, 89.
5. *Ibid.*, 283.
6. *Ibid.*, 38.
7. *Ibid.*, 145.
8. The Noble Savage is usually male, as seen in James Fenimore Cooper's character Chingachgook and Lydia Marie Child's Hobomok. Popular culture continues to focus on male characters at the expense of female characters.
9. Jackson, 132.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 182.
12. *Ibid.*, 209.
13. *Ibid.*, 224.
14. *Ibid.*, 245.
15. *Ibid.*, 245.
16. *Ibid.*, 246.
17. *Ibid.*, 247.
18. *Ibid.*, 253.
19. Nancy Woloch, ed., *Early American Women: A Documentary History, 1600-1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 155.
20. Jackson, 288.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 128.
23. In an ironic and somewhat damning twist, Ramona marries her surrogate brother, Felipe, after Alessandro's death and thus returns to her previous lifestyle. Though her true Indian identity has been revealed she seems to turn away from it in favor of social and material security: "An untried future beckoned,—a future which she would embrace and conquer for her daughter." Jackson, 360.
24. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, "Editor's Introduction," in *Wynema: A Child of the*

Forest by S. Alice Callahan (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), xxix.

25. S. Alice Callahan, *Wynema, a Child of the Forest* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 3.

26. Ruoff, xxviii-xxix.

27. *Ibid.*, xxix.

28. Ruoff describes Callahan's modifications of "este charte" dialect thus: "Callahan relies mainly on imitations of Muscogee pronunciation of English and sentence structure. She omits articles, the word *to* as a preposition or part of an infinitive, verb endings that indicate number and tense, and parts of words and sentences." Callahan, 14.

29. Callahan, 7.

30. *Ibid.*, 10.

31. *Ibid.*, 19.

32. *Ibid.*, 20.

33. *Ibid.*, 23.

34. *Ibid.*, 37.

35. *Ibid.*, 67.

36. *Ibid.*, 38.

37. *Ibid.*, 94.

38. *Ibid.*, 63.

39. *Ibid.*, 68.

40. Silverman, 130.

41. *Ibid.*, 128-129.

42. Mourning Dove, *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 15.

43. *Ibid.*, 16.

44. *Ibid.*, 17.

45. Gloria Anzaluá, *Borderlands/La Frontera The New Mestiza*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999), 70.

46. Mourning Dove, 59, original emphasis.

47. *Ibid.*, 65.

48. Densmore is the white, upper-class man who comes to work on the ranch for the adventure and who woos Cogewea only because he wants to obtain lands she is rumored to possess. Upon finding that she has no wealth he beats her and abandons her.

49. Mourning Dove, 161.

50. *Ibid.*, 177.

51. *Ibid.*, 104.

52. *Ibid.*, 144.

53. *Ibid.*, 138.

54. Martha Viehmann, "My People. . . My Kind: Mourning Dove's Cogewea, *The Half-Blood, as a Narrative of Mixed Descent*," in *Early Native American Writing: New Critical Essays*, ed., Helen Jaskoski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 213.

55. *Ibid.*, 206.

56. Dexter Fisher, "Introduction," in *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range* by Mourning Dove (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), xvii.

57. Viehmann, 206.

58. *Ibid.*, 204.

59. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 48.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, 49.