

**Speculative Fiction in Native American Indian Literature:  
Active Resistance to Female American Indian Stereotypes**

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Native American authors who are actively seeking to disrupt patriarchy and colonial narratives tend not to write in the literary genre of speculative fiction, which is a literary form that often serves to subvert Indigenous identities through colonial pedagogy of racial, sexual, and gendered clichés. I argue that the Native American voice, both male and female, is a form of active resistance to the master narrative, and those voices are changing how Native American Indian communities view their histories and identities through contemporary speculative fiction. I also assert that Native American authors are examining the multiplicities and conflicts of their identities through the genre of speculative fiction, which cultivates new critical theories for Native American literatures. Through an extensive literary review of Blake Hausman's novel, *Riding the Trail of Tears*, and a textual reading of the female protagonist, Tallulah Wilson, I suggest that commonly held stereotypes of Native American Indian women are undergoing a radical and empowering movement through speculative fiction narratives.

## Introduction

Writing and researching Native American speculative fiction as a non-native woman is intrinsically complicated and in my opinion, must be approached with care and consideration. I don't have the insider knowledge of a Native woman, thus I can only understand what Native discourses in speculative fiction imply through a particular lens, and my point of view is subjective because of my ethnicity and gender. I will never have the cultural understanding an American Indian woman would have about how stereotypes impact Native women's lives; however, I do have an obligation to respond and support Native efforts of resistance as an ally. The relationship between non-Native scholars and Native scholars and authors is a work in progress, but a work that must be led by Indigenous peoples in order to avoid perpetuation of colonial oppression. In her recent article, "Decolonizing Together: Moving Beyond a Politics of Solidarity Toward a Practice of Decolonization," author Harsha Walia states:

One of the basic principles of Indigenous solidarity organizing is the notion of taking leadership.

According to this principle, non-natives must be accountable and responsive to the experiences, voices, needs and political perspectives of Indigenous people themselves. From an anti-oppression perspective, meaningful support for Indigenous struggles cannot be directed by non-natives. Taking leadership means being humble and honouring front-line voices of resistance as well as offering tangible solidarity as needed and requested. Specifically, this translates to taking initiative for self-education about the specific histories of the lands we reside upon, organizing support with the clear consent and guidance of an Indigenous community or group, building long-term relationships of accountability and never

assuming or taking for granted the personal and political trust that non-natives may earn from

Indigenous peoples over time. (Walia, Harsha. [www.briarpatchmagazine.com](http://www.briarpatchmagazine.com))

Whether a non-Native scholar has the right or the ability to research and or teach Native literature is often a contentious subject. Does the act of racializing the pedagogy of literature perpetuate the ethnic and racial dialogues that are prevalent in almost every aspect of our education? To say that a Black scholar can only study and teach Black literature, an Asian scholar Asian literature, and Western European scholars Western European literature seems to encourage racial or cultural biases rather than mutual understanding. Can there be any true change in the dialogue about ethnic and racial tensions inherited by our colonial history without breaking down the color barriers in literature? On the other hand, white privilege has led to countless and often unbelievable appropriations of Indigenous literature, culture, and history, which have perpetuated colonial ideology. These beliefs impact our everyday lives, communities, universities, and laws. As a non-Native, how do I speak without insider knowledge of Native perspectives? I must not assume that the area of my study and research is in any way a reflection of how Native scholars and peoples understand their own narratives. I can only relate to and rely on the individual texts, theories, and authors to gain an understanding of Indigenous literature and theory as a white female. I do not feel that this perspective inhibits my ability to respond to Native literature and to engage in a discipline that seeks to deeply understand the discourse Native authors are engaged in through their work.

Regardless of my personal views, the pedagogy and sovereignty of intellectual, creative, and historic rights to Native scholarship must be determined by Indigenous peoples. There are many American Indian authors whose works achieve the highest critical acclaim, and some feel that only Native scholars should have the agency to teach and critique their work. One such noted author, Sherman Alexie, publicly criticizes non-Native scholars who presume to teach or critique Native literature. The discourse and Alexie's argument are the foundation of his novel, *Indian Killer*. In response to Alexie's views, Patrice Hollrah, a University of Las Vegas

professor, addresses the tensions regarding insider/outsider theory in her article “Sherman Alexie’s Challenge to the Academy’s Teaching of Native American Literature, Non-Native Writers, and Critics.” Hollrah states,

According to Alexie, non-Native scholars are left without entry into the criticism of his work because they cannot speak with authority as cultural insiders. True, they are limited by their position, but at the same time, not all of them attempt to speak with the authority of cultural insiders. There are white scholars who consciously listen to what the Native scholars and critics prescribe in terms of approaches to the literature, whether those are tribal-specific cultural and historical contexts, issues of sovereignty and connections to the land, and /or literary criticism developed from the literature of the tribe in question. (32)

Alexie’s views should be taken into consideration as his work has often been subjected to the criticism of non-Native scholars, whose address often comes from a space of white privilege and little to no insider knowledge. However, I would argue that non-Native and Native scholars have equal responsibility to study and teach Native literature by addressing the gaps created by insider/ outsider positionality as a transparent part of Native literary studies. Hollrah explains Alexie’s point of view regarding outsider appropriation of Native literature: “Alexie rejects white writers who believe they understand the lives of American Indians, and by writing about Indians, white writers perpetuate the colonizing act of telling the reading public what Indians are ‘really’ like” (30). It is through the acknowledgment of the limitations of a white/outsider perspective that offers, if not a solution, then certainly a start in cultivating healthy alliances in regards to Native literatures and studies. Indigenous grassroots movements such as “Idle No More” continue to build alliances with non-Natives in support of Native rights and sovereignty. It is imperative that alliances are formed by Indigenous peoples rather than non-Natives, to disrupt any claim to Native sovereignty. White privilege has no place in the formation of the critical bridges needed for decolonization. Native-driven alliances in the academy are fundamental as well, and all scholars need to actively seek them. Hollrah

suggest that “...perhaps white scholars writing about Native literatures should consult Native sources or admit the limited perspective of their work” (33). Any research, my own included, is unsound without the advice and knowledge of Indigenous sources that lend direction and guidance to work done by non-Native scholars. It is the decolonization process of American Indian stereotypes that drives my own interest, and it has been through the mentorship and many consultations with American Indian scholars and authors that have informed my research. Native authors writing in speculative fiction have used science fiction, horror, and fantasy to address the many complex issues of gender, sovereignty, Native stereotypes, decolonization, privilege, power, and rights in Native narratives that bridge the barriers often found in Western literatures.

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I see speculative fiction as a disruption of colonial literary models in genres that often rely on Western privileged perspectives involving the appropriation of Indigenous culture, land, and resources through the process of colonization. In the hands of Indigenous and Native writers including Blake Hausman, Daniel Heath Justice, Drew Taylor, and Eden Robinson, speculative fiction has the ability to alter colonial perspectives by addressing Native peoples, especially women, as contemporary characters who navigate multiple identities in a world that largely associates Native identity with dated, harmful, and derogatory stereotypes. How and why do these disruptions work and what do they say about the nature of literary privilege? According to his essay “Aboriginality in Science Fiction,” author Brian Attiebery argues that “Science Fiction is often concerned with the ways in which cultures interact, most obviously in stories of first contact or interplanetary warfare. By allowing writers to dramatize negotiations among radically differing world-views and ways of life, the genre becomes what Mary Louise Pratt calls an ‘art of the contact zone’ ” (385). Native speculative fiction implies that it is not history that changes, but rather the lens we choose to see history through that marks the change. The negotiation of the contact zone is when we begin to understand Native authorship through the author-reader

contract. The reader and the author are intrinsically charged to give attention to the interruption of colonial dialog that promotes damaging and ethnocentric stereotyping.

The author-reader contract is subjective to the changes imposed by the scholar or reader who may hold particular cultural and personal predigests and beliefs towards Native literature. Thus, particular attention needs to be given to the Native author's authority over his or her narrative, which originates from the intellectual sovereignty over their work. Native cultural and intellectual sovereignty has historically been appropriated by European and American authors or eradicated from the American lexicon through the constructs of Western ideals of literature. The authenticity and authority of Native literary works are intrinsically bound with the Native author's individual tribal knowledge, which informs their work through a collective language and cultural history. For non-Native scholars the importance of approaching Native authorship and literature with circumspection is imperative due to the appropriation of Native narratives and subsequent casting of derogatory stereotypes and abuse of tribal history, language, literature, and culture. A non-Native scholar who presumes to be an authority on Native literature risks perpetuating the cycle of appropriation, thus limiting the resources inherent in Native authorship, textual theory and scholarship, and the ability to engage in Native discourse that inevitably alters racial and ethnic understandings.

Native American authorship in speculative fiction genres forms discourses that tend to suggest alternative futures for Native Americans outside of colonial attitudes. The inheritance of tribal knowledge, culture, and self-proclaimed identity, which lie outside of Western European banality, resists the commodification and appropriation of Native American and Indigenous literature. The creation of alternate discourses through the speculative work of Native authors and professors disrupts damaging and derogatory stereotypes and presents an opportunity to strike these narratives from the collective imagination. Native American speculative fiction allows for the dismantling of colonial constructs in academics, scholarly work, mainstream fiction, and nonfiction with implications affecting how entertainment and media industries portray

Native Americans. The implications suggest that there is a vital reclamation of Native American identity and the dissemination of history from a perspective other than empirical epistemology. This is particularly relevant when examining Native American women's identities. Western literary feminist theories struggle to articulate Native identity for Indigenous women, and in many cases falls short of critically examining how Native identities have been exploited throughout Western history. Pejorative historic discourses that align with common Eurocentric images of Native women continue to malign Native American feminine identity in much of contemporary literature and film.

Female stereotypes are structured in such a way as to portray Native women as either the Native princess who is sexually inviting and available to white men, or the savage squaw who is lacking in white notions of morality, honesty, and self-control. It is rare, even in contemporary literature, that Native women are depicted as real women, wholly and inscrutably their essential selves with all their complexities. Thus, female Native American characters tend to be written as hyper-sexualized supporting characters or flat characters that serve to enlighten readers to the white protagonist's attributes, struggles, or development. As troubling as it is, authors continue to recycle clichés that are designed to belittle American Indian women through narratives by alienating them from the plot in any manner that lies outside general type castings. Yet there is a vibrant and powerful response that has been issued by many Native authors who put pressure on the derogatory and damaging typing of Native women. One such stereotype is addressed in Debra Merskin's article, "The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman" in which she explains:

This article examines the term squaw, its presentation in popular culture, and how this framing constructs Native womanhood in the public imagination. Two primary representations are revealed in the discourse defining squaw: as sexual punching bag and as drudge. The opinions and attitudes of reporters, citizens (Indian and non-Indian), government officials, agencies, and tribal representatives are included as reflected in journalistic accounts of the land form debate about the



use and meaning of the label squaw. The psychological impact of this racial and sexual slur has a significant negative impact on quality of life, perceptions, and opportunities for Native American women (ethnostress) due to the consistent use and reification of the squaw stereotype through more than 400 years of U.S. history. (345)

Native authors writing in speculative fiction are able to navigate the perspectives of history to transform colonialist narratives into stories that affirm Native women's identities. As the academy begins to engage more fully in the curriculum of Native speculative texts, the natural progression should be a disruption of the static archetypal ideas of Native identity. Native speculative fiction challenges commonly held stereotypes of Native women, but it also challenges the fabrication of Native extinction. Through the execution of writing Native characters as central protagonists within rich, modern, and futuristic settings, Native authors force the critical examination of incongruous lexicons, histories, and futures of Native peoples.

Native speculative fiction offers substantive content to the fields of American Indian Studies, Ethnic Studies, White Studies, and Indigenous Literature Studies. Contemporary Native literature's use of transformative language resists damaging depictions of Native women as self-induced victims and goes further in empowering Native women to define, outside of literature, their own identities. The research and study of Native speculative fiction demystifies how racialization, genocide, and other factors have constructed an academic bias that defends against the reclamation of identity outside of empirical rhetoric. Thus, speculative fiction is used as a means of active resistance to the misrepresentation that has been perpetuated since first contact by engaging in a perspective outside of commonly held U.S. historical constructs. The representations of historical records and literary discourses by non-Native people portray unbalanced and exclusive accounts of Native narratives as authentic. I suggest that as Native literature presents new understandings of Native histories in which academic archives will expand to an inclusive model in order to support the reclamation of Indigenous and Native identities outside of colonial models.

Gabriel Estrada explains in her essay, “Native Avatars, Online Hubs, and Urban Indian Literature”, that virtual and science fiction worlds are tools with which teachers and professors are able to help deconstruct stereotypes represented both inside and outside of Native literature. Estrada states, “Like written literature itself, online and virtual capacities can evolve to serve American Indian narratives, identities and literatures even when they were not originally designed to do so. Online and virtual resources can support an understanding of urban American Indian literature and can also play an evolving role in the formation of the web-like relationships that comprise real-world and online Native urban hubs” (67). Native authors Blake Hausman and Daniel Justice, as well as many others, are actively engaged in responding to the complexity of the urban American Indian and evolving Native identity. Working within constructs and models that are typically designed to underscore the authority of Western European ideologies in regards to Native identity are not new to Indigenous authors; however, new technologies and untraditional genres have opened alternate avenues for urban Native Americans to directly influence the way in which, and by whom, Native discourses are resisting appropriation. There is still the issue of Western European rapacity that maintains outdated and damaging stereotypes of Native women, men, culture, and narratives, but rather than be victimized, there is a growing and active repositioning of control over Native images and futures by Native communities.

Even with technology and virtual resources, Female American Indians who do not conform to either white feminist theory or to minority theory are often neglected in feminist discourses. The unique relationship between Native women and feminist discourse demands a new way of reading and critiquing Native identity within literature. The social implications of studying identity through speculative fiction forces typically colonial models of writing to include the Native voice. Genres such as science fiction and fantasy often anchor their narratives in empirical agency portraying typical protagonists as invaders of lands and worlds not their own. Science fiction not only concerns itself with the empirical invasion of physical space but also the conquest of the female body. The subject of Native feminism is often complicated by the recycled images of Native or

Indigenous women as a part of the landscape, to be appropriated at will, just like resources. We can see this trope re-stylized recently in the film, “Avatar” by James Cameron. Professor and author, Lisa Udel, mentions in her essay, “Revising Strategies: The Intersection of Literature and Activism in Contemporary Native Women’s Writing”, “Native identity and survival in the modern world; the role or responsibility of the writer, the intellectual, the artist, and the tribal member in Native America, how history has determined and continues to influence tribal politics and indigenous survival; and lastly, how these issues concern the ongoing struggle” (64-65). In the pursuit of understanding Native feminine identity through Native literature, I suggest that Native speculative fiction has the potential to stand in resistance to the perpetual resurgence of erroneous Native feminine stereotypes in mainstream entertainment, whether it is literature or film. We can also infer from Udel’s observation that there is an inherent responsibility for the narratives of Native fiction to disrupt the complacency of accepting other cultures’ historical influences on Indigenous survival.

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Native literature contributes a unique perspective on racial and ethnic pedagogy prevalent in the colonial constructs in the Americas. It is through the voices of Native authors that the act of resistance is visually and intellectually demonstrated. Western literature and theories are often one of the ways in which Indigenous identities are rigorously constructed through the master narratives. Due to pressure from mainstream entertainment and cultural disassociation towards Native identities, there is a need to theorize the canon of Native American literary works that requires an awareness of Indigenous knowledge in approaching Native American literature. In *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature: Dakota and Haudenosaunee Writing and Indigenous Worldviews*, Penelope Kelsey argues, “In the field of literary study critical theory is such a rarified area that any pretense to it on the part of scholars critically informed by tribal viewpoints and whose rhetoric is not that of the academy is often dismissed as unsophisticated and essentialist. Both criticisms strike me as evidence of the disjuncture between the texts studied and those writing them and being depicted in them” (4).

Kelsey's argument suggests that tribal knowledge is the foundation needed to theorize indigenous texts. Such knowledge is inherent through the function of speculative fiction by informing the readers of a change in perception that acts to alter Western thought and theory in order to embrace tribal theory in the critical reading of Native texts. This understanding is vital to disrupting the lens used in the critique of Native literature, primarily due to the misconception that Native American identity is located under one perception of Native identity. The sovereignty of Native peoples is diverse and complex. Each Nation has a rich history and individual experiences that are unique to a particular epistemology of that tribe. Yet Westernized perceptions continue to use the term Native American as a blanket term for peoples rich in diverse narratives. Thus, it is imperative that the academy approaches Native text with theories that seek to understand Native discourse outside of Western literary conventions.

If we approach academia as the product of colonial patriarchal influences, then the Native voice by its mere existence stands in resistance to Western-based literary theories. Dr. Billy J. Stratton, an Assistant Professor at the University of Denver, along with Dr. Frances Washburn from the University of Arizona, critiques a new theory that examines the literary work of Native American Indian literature in their article, "The Peoplehood Matrix: A New Theory for American Indian Literature". They maintain, "The need for a more comprehensive theoretical approach is highlighted by the underrepresentation of Native literary analysis in scholarly journals, both in American literature and American Indian/Native studies" (51). The perception of Native literature is often one that aligns with misrepresentations of Native identities, which prevents the acceptance of contemporary narratives from Native authors. The continuation of perceiving Native peoples through the stereotypes portrayed in film, T.V., and novels fail to show Native discourse as vibrant, living, diverse, and modern in its approach to contemporary issues.

The use of Western, as well as Native, literary devices are not only prevalent in Native literature, but challenges traditional genres through the individual experiences of Native authors who continue to put pressure

on Western theory and constructs of writing. Stratton and Washburn address the issues surrounding language, oral traditions, mysticism, and sacred histories. The idea of a new theoretical approach to Native text lays the foundation for a new way of analyzing identity, in particular for Native women, who have been written with stereotyped characterizations and tropes through colonial models. Yet it is in the text written by Native American women that the voice of resistance transforms into the voice of reclamation. The change from survival language to activist language cries out for theoretical understanding beyond Western epistemologies of literary theories such as Feminist and Marxist theory.

Reaching beyond theory, Native literature also engages in deconstructing the mythologies surrounding Native identities. Native authors address myths that speak to cultural and spiritual understandings; however, navigating through stereotypes while speaking the truths of one's beliefs is fraught with conflicting messages. The navigation of truths and myths can be particularly true in regards to Native authors as Western constructions of fiction and reality are often seen as binary, which may not hold true for Indigenous texts and traditions. Sarah Eden Schiff addresses these issues in her essay: "Power Literature and the Myth of Racial Memory". Schiff suggests, "Because history, of course, has most often been set down by the victors (colonialist, slaveholders, makers of immigration policies) and because the archive offers only a limited view of life pre-contact, authors of Power literature make the strategic choice to employ auspicious narrative of distinct non-dominant cultures in the universal realm of myth" (100). In Native American literature, these mythologies promote areas of concern within which the female voice may become subject to the master narrative stereotypes of Native American women.

It is imperative that the scholarly examination of how Native women are framed within Native narratives includes, "analyzing the imaginative representation of society and conflicts faced by characters in their everyday recognizable worlds, or in fantastic and surreal realms" (260), argues author Ketu H. Katrack in her essay, "Research Methods in Reading Ethnic Literatures". Katrack continues, "Literary interpretation

retains the excitement of suggesting fluid and open-ended responses along with incorporating relevant historical material, archival data, and ethnographic material” (260). By writing Native narratives in a genre such as science fiction, we find new ways of perceiving interdisciplinary theories and rise to embrace the unique nature of the reclamation of Native American female identity through the deconstruction of colonial ideologies perpetuated by Western literary works, which are often left unchallenged. The complacency of readership in regards to female stereotypes in literature perhaps reflects the ideas presented by fictional truths, that is, the acceptance of reading fictional reality as truth. The problem with such literary consequence is that, historically, there has been relatively little representation of Native Americans in literature that have originated outside of Western constructs, such as from tribal and Native agency. In other words, the American lexicon is rife with fictional biases that are recirculated without an honest representation of Native identities from Native scholarship and tribal theory.

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Analyzing Western feminist theory in order to understand Native American women stereotypes in contemporary literature continues to be problematic. Patrice E. M. Hollrah addresses the specific issues in her book, *The Old Lady Trill, The Victory Yell: The Power of Women in Native American Literature*. She notes, “Native critics, such as Kathryn Shanley (Assinibonie) and Devon Mihesuah (Oklahoma Choctaw), also see gender in tribal contexts” (21). Mihesuah writes: “White feminists tend to focus on gender oppression and to overlook racial issues, thus alienating many Indian females” (21). Such criticism of literary theory allows for engagement with a Native perspective in order to ascertain the value of Western-driven theory for a critical analysis of Native American literature engaging in statements of identity. The pressure to conform to a generalized and static Native woman character within literature derives from long-held ideas about what a Native woman is, where she comes from, what she looks like, what she wears, her intelligence, her agenda, and most of all, her position in relation to white males and subservience to white females.

Western feminist theory marginalizes the very voice that seeks to assert itself in Native American literature. Hollrah suggests, “Critiquing Native American literature with the application of feminist criticism, which originates in a different environment, assumes that all things are equal, and that, of course, is not always the case with regard to race, tribe, culture, and gender” (23). While Native American women resist the colonial model of stereotypes and a forced gendered identity through literature, the academy holds on to deeply rooted epistemologies, and in doing so, forces theories that not only subvert resistance but attempt to colonize Native literary works. Hollrah explains, “Although Native women might have problems with the significance of feminism when applied to their culture, what matters most is the issue of voice and who has authority to speak for Native women” (23). Thus, the voice of the Native author pushes against standard western theory whether it is feminist in nature or not.

We can ascertain that the reclamation of Native female identity is as tied to Western ideologies as much as Western pedagogy, but through active resistance by Native authors and scholars, such narratives are slipping and a new lexicon of Native literature is awakening. I suggest that an epicenter for the engagement and discourse reclaiming female identity in Native American literature rests in new theories that are being proposed within Native speculative fiction and by Native literary scholars. Author and critic Lisa J. Udel examines the cohesive nature of Native American Indian feminist activism through literary discourse in her essay, “The Intersection of Literature and Activism in Contemporary Native Women’s Writing.” Udel offers an alternative to white privileged feminist theory by placing pressure on non-Native readers along with Native readers to embrace the female voice in a different context. Udel explains, “In exposing the reader to the violence of Euro-American expansion and domination during the last three centuries, native authors overtly seek to educate the non-Native reader uninformed of such history while also confirming experiences known to Native readers” (62). Thus, it is suggested that the reader is responsible for responding to Native American Indian women’s voices as an act of resistance to western thought on feminism in a patriarchal constructed system. When

speaking of feminist issues, it is important to understand that Native women view feminist issues from a different perspective. Genres such as speculative fiction are intrinsically adaptable when presenting alternate perceptions of fictional truths, and it is equally plausible that these asserted fictional truths can eventually become social or communal realities.

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The need to constantly re-address the damage of recirculating stereotypes of Native women in modern society is evident by the continued resurgence of the Pocahontas, Native princess, and Sacajawea myths that are still prevalent in contemporary literature and film. The Native Princess motif is often referenced by media and entertainment as recently evidenced by Victoria's Secret, Urban Outfitters, and the Indie rock band *No Doubt's* music video, "Looking Hot." Even without direct association to Native characters, the appropriation and commodification of Native women is closely associated to skin, hair, facial features, and costumes, often causing Native women to be subjected to sexual fantasy leading to unmitigated violence. Tarrell Awe Agahe Portman and Roger D. Harring claim that historical and contemporary stereotypes of American Indian women, the princess and savage, results in inaccurate images. Though they suggest that their article, "Debunking the Pocahontas Paradox: The Need for a Humanistic Perspective," promotes a "humanistic" perspective on "this population," it remains a segregated issue and a continuation of the colonial mindset of the female identity as separate from other populations of women. This is a common perception of contemporary thought. Portman states, "The past 20 years have witnessed a renewed interest in rewriting the history of Native American Indian women. The central problem has been the lack of Native American Indian perspectives in writing. An examination of the roles of Native American Indian women is needed within "their own societies and society at large" (Bataille & Sands, 1984, p.viii). Although there are numerous female Native authors writing prolifically, there remains a resistance from the academy and mainstream publishers to promote text that debunk the status quo and acknowledge the need to read indigenous text from a non-Western epistemology.



Although the princess/ squaw complex is still promoted in modern media and literature, as seen in the films “Pocahontas,” produced in 1995 by Buena Vista Pictures and “King Kong” in 2005 by Universal Pictures, these are just some examples of the struggle against stereotypes that American Indian women confront every day. The Native princess costumes that fill Halloween stores every year is a strong indication that these stereotypes are promoted as profitable and are difficult to displace, although Native authors are challenging the commodification of these stereotypes through literary and scholarly discourse every day. In her essay, “The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman,” Debra Merskin maintains, “the term squaw has an element of discourse that frames a version of indigenous female-ness consistent with the historical colonial constructs of stereotypes of American Indians in general as animalistic, savage, and subhuman. The emphasis is on representational ethics—who has the right to represent others and under what circumstances” (346). Native authors are effectively reclaiming the rights to their own identities by putting pressure on the squaw image as much as the Indian princess image.

It is through their efforts that false perceptions and redundant images are being challenged in contemporary text and speculative fiction. Author Blake Hausman realizes the need for a contemporary characterization of Native women and approaches the need through the science fiction genre. In an email interview with the author in regards to his approach to writing a Native science fiction novel, Hausman states, “Tallulah’s character had to be a woman. That was obvious to me from the beginning. It’s my small way of paying respect to our matriarchal and matrilineal traditions. With all the emphasis on reclamation throughout the story, it seemed crucial that the story attempt to reclaim a kind of woman-centric cultural logic” (Hausman). Hausman’s response to my query in regards to the reclamation of Native female identity acknowledges that more work is needed in order to fully disrupt derogatory language and scripted character types in literature and mass media that perpetuate these damaging stereotypes. How we perceive women through literary language is often dictated by the social constructs that marginalize and dehumanize Native women. Merskin identifies the

power of literature through language by suggesting, "Language constructs knowledge and knowledge is power, according to theorists, philosophers, and scholars. The words we choose help social constructs, cultural, economic, and historical reality; thus, discourses of domination put language to the social use of defining and oppressing those constructed as other" (349).

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Blake Hausman's novel, *Riding the Trail of Tears*, demonstrates how Native authors are using speculative fiction to address issues of stereotypes of Native women in contemporary literature. Published in 2012, the novel centers on its protagonist, Tallulah Wilson, who has a complex identity as both a Native Cherokee and Anglo American. The racial and ethnic tension is further complicated by her gender as she maneuvers through the many common and often derogatory stereotypes held by the guests who participate in the Trail of Tears virtual ride. The guests stereotyping of Tallulah as a Native woman is integrated with her Native features and the presupposed Native experience she is assumed to possess. The presupposition often relies on fictional framing found in the social constructs of Native identity through a non-Native lens and, as such, is difficult to dislodge let alone identify. In reality, Tallulah's identity aligns with many Native women who have been raised outside of Native communities. Tallulah's indoctrination into Cherokee history and community come much later in her life as she is reunited with her Native lineage after the death of her father. Thus, Tallulah's position as the onsite historian, program content writer, and tour guide for the tour forces her to assume several different identities. Hausman develops the complexity of Tallulah's character in such a way as to put pressure on her agency as the authority and historian of the Cherokee removal, her experience as a woman who navigates her ethnicity, as both Native and non-Native, to thrive in the contemporary world. In this manner, Tallulah disrupts the characterization of Native women in an active resistance to stereotyping.

"Defining the racial backgrounds and cultural adherences of Indian women are crucial to forming an accurate portrait of their lives," (18) states Devon A. Mihesuah in her essay, "Commonality of Difference:

American Indian Women and History.” Mihesuah’s addresses the cultural and racial backgrounds of Native women who are portrayed in fiction which falls short of accurate portrayals. Ethnic, racial, and cultural beliefs are founded in relation to the narrative truth of Native identities. Fictional truths are subjective; they have the ability to develop into objective truths about Native women. Hausman promotes the use of narrative framing in Tallulah’s character. As the content writer and historian for the Trail of Tears ride, Tallulah must convey the historical accuracy of the Cherokee Removal, not as the subjective narrative that has been accepted by most non-Native people as “truth,” but as the act of genocide that it was. The hardships, brutality, and death experienced by those individuals who were subjected to the removal are as faithfully recreated as possible through Tallulah’s narrative. The Trail of Tears is an objective truth; that is, we know it happened, when it happened, and how it happened. However non-Native narratives about the removal are subjective due to the historic appropriation and alteration by dominant Western mythologies of Manifest Destiny. Even Tallulah’s desire for accuracy suggests rifts in her ability to objectify her personal history through the lens of her Native identity. As the premier tour guide, Tallulah is forced to relive the traumatic events and collective experience of the removal with every tour. As she tries to contextualize herself in the virtual world, one that relies on her to assume aspects of a subjective Native female stereotype, she must attempt to emulate and reject them in order to navigate the reality of whom she is outside of the virtual ride.

Hausman’s complicated development of Tallulah’s position within the ride, which supposes she assume the very stereotypes that she resists, has the potential to undermine his decision to address Native stereotypes in his novel. As Hausman explains, “I was particularly concerned about how I might unintentionally re-inscribe such stereotypes, even if my intention was to explode them. Indeed, I was concerned about the gamut of stereotypes that one could project upon Tallulah.” Hausman’s concerns are valid, yet I suggest that his use of science fiction allows for an alternate perspective. The way in which Tallulah’s resistance is framed allows her to expand on the strict censure of subjective identity within the narrative. That is, speculative fiction blurs the

lines of subjective and objective truths within fiction. As a reader, fictional truth readily adapts to a possible truth in the speculative fiction genre. I suggest that a reader is willing to believe, within the narrative, in the existence of other life forms in the universe, fairies in the forest, werewolves, vampires and alternate universes. This ability to subjectively believe fiction in what we might term “real life” allows our inherent fixed truths to alter. In other words, we are more inclined to perceive that our reality is not necessarily real and that there are other truths we can accept. As such, social constructions or fictional truths about Native Americans based on Western stereotypes can be presented in speculative fiction as alternate histories and futures, and eventually adopted as truth. The characters are free to reclaim identities that actively resist common stereotypes that in classic genres might imply a character’s unreliability. An author-reader contract can be broken when the reader perceives a character assuming a type so far outside the frame and context that they literally become unbelievable. I use the term “unreliable characters” in the context of epistemology, knowing that we think we know about Native women, and how the disruption of that model in a romance, mystery, or drama genre, would in essence break the author-reader contract, whereas in speculative fiction, the reader expects epistemological constructs to be broken.

Hausman’s engagement with re-scripting Native female stereotypes through Tallulah’s character has the potential to be burdened with the weight of bi-racial tension, especially as she creates the Cherokee Removal program after reconnecting with her Native origin. According to Miheesuah, “To date, studies of multi-heritage Indians that portray them as ‘cultural brokers’ or ‘cultural mediator’ make broad generalizations without a sociological understanding of the mixed-heritage person.” She queries, “How do these elements contribute to the psychological and sociological make-up of Indian women with bifurcated racial and cultural background?” (18). For Tallulah, this question is often buried beneath her daily struggle to maintain her appearance of control and normalcy. The mask she has created in order to navigate a fragmented identity cracks, and her authentic “self,” a self that is revealed as she comes to situations in which the program she helped write, goes “rogue” and

she is eventually left exposed. Hausman reveals that when Tallulah is not in control of the ride and the programming that she is unable to maintain her confidence in assuming her bi-racial roles. In these moments, Tallulah is unmasked, and her vulnerability is evident through the confusion surrounding her identity, heritage, responsibilities, and her status as a woman. Hausman illustrates this essential struggle by laying the responsibility on Tallulah to resist Native stereotypes in a game that is based on her assuming those same stereotypes in order to “educate” her non-Native guests.

To further complicate Tallulah’s objective, Hausman creates obstacles that interfere with her resistance to stereotypes through the allusion to a “new” Indian agency, which is represented in the novel as Homeland Security. Homeland Security is the Western authority that will hold Tallulah responsible for the program’s anomalies as well as Tallulah’s own anomalies of identity. Hausman uses historical references to interrogations by Indian agents in Tallulah’s internal dialog concerning her interrogation by Homeland Security agents describes how deeply contemporary narrative resist the reclamation of Native identity. “Tallulah thinks of new nouns and adjectives to describe these people, verb phrases and concrete images, but instead she only hears herself repeating herself. She knows that she often repeats herself when she doesn’t know what she’s trying to say. She doesn’t want to stutter in front of Homeland Security, but maybe some stuttering and repetition would help her cause, make her seem more innocent, get her home as early as possible” (289). Hausman illustrates Tallulah’s difficulty in articulating her identity as a Native woman to an outside authority, which underscores issues surrounding the persistent re-appropriation of erroneous Native female stereotypes in contemporary social constructs.

Speculative fiction is one way in which Native authors are addressing narrative forms of resistance toward Native women’s identities. Brian Attiebery’s work, “Aboriginality in Science Fiction,” suggests that science fiction literature “is to show us our own preconceptions and offer ways to bypass them” (402). Examples of bypassing preconceptions and stereotypes in speculative fiction are new discourses for Native

authors. *Riding the Trail of Tears*, is one example of the influence that speculative fiction exerts in bypassing colonial narratives. Hausman uses Tallulah's physical appearance, emotional struggles, and relationships to both her Native heritage and white heritage as interplay on the modern struggles that Native women often navigate. Hausman suggests that it is not the responsibility of Natives to "teach" non-Natives about common stereotypes, contemporary Native identity, and cultural reclamation. Hausman does this by immersing Tallulah in the role of a truth teacher, all the while creating conflicts in her relationships towards the ride's guests as well as her culpability in supporting Native gender roles within the ride.

One example Hausman uses to illustrate the conflicts of reclamation of cultural identity and the need to relate to the non-Native guest is Tallulah's creation of the program for the "Old Medicine Man." Her program includes ambient flute and wind instrument music that intertwine with his speaking voice. Every guest who travels the Trail of Tears gets to visit with the Old Medicine Man at the end of the ride. Because most participants die early on the Trail of Tears and often are not interested in experiencing the ride once the brutality of the removal is realized, they wish to skip ahead to the Medicine Man in order to get the spiritual mysticism they think they have earned. It is the Old Medicine Man who is the primary reason many ride the Trail of Tears. Tallulah designs the Medicine Man to have a tranquil voice and ageless wisdom so that everyone speaking with him appears to be given the Native mystic guidance they desire. The guests are soothed regardless of their ability to understand him.

Hausman suggests that Tallulah is aware that her use of stereotypes, such as Indian flute music and mystic medicine men, are expectations that non-Natives demand. If certain stereotypes of Native Americans attempt to bypass preconceptions, it would be unlikely that the virtual ride would be profitable. Tallulah realizes that she must in some ways exploit certain stereotypes for entertainment purposes in order to begin supplanting the Western narrative of the Trail of Tears with the true account of the removal. Thus, she is left with the task of navigating what aspects of Native culture and identity are the most important. One can surmise that for

Hausman, the value of disrupting Western narratives of the Cherokee removal serves a larger purpose. However, a deeper reading of the text implies that Hausman's intentional exploitation of the physical stereotyping in the virtual ride is an "in your face" example of erroneous ideas about Native Americans. The guests are presented Native bodies that support preconceived notions or characterizations depicted in Western literature, art, and film. The high cheekbones, long ebony hair, tan smooth skin, and hyper-sexualized virility clearly meet the expectations of the guest. Tallulah explains, "It's true. Everyone's breasts and penises are slightly larger on the Trail of Tears. Anything to ensure customer satisfaction, regardless of historical inaccuracy, and body parts are always a welcome distraction for the average customer. Tallulah used to resent these enhancements, but right now she is deeply grateful for the TREPP's tourist fantasy" (94). Hausman raises a critical question of appropriation and use of Native identity even if it is the invention of Western racialization. Hausman's play with appropriation serves to enlighten the readers rather than the characters by developing the conflating worlds of resistance and exploitation. I suggest that speculative fiction is a genre that is flexible enough to contain the narrative confusion of the biases and the conflicting questions surrounding the complex issues of appropriation.

To both Tallulah's identity and the complexity of Native cultural appropriation and history, she is not only responsible for teaching the tourists about the Cherokee removal and genocide, but also contemporary misconceptions driven by American capitalism misappropriation of the Cherokee Jeep, the Comanche missile, and Geronimo as a battle cry for special operations or acts of valor. Tallulah's responsibility as a Native woman is put under extreme pressure to assume not only the reclamation of her own Native female identity but the collective experience of generations of appropriations, as well as gender, culture, ethnic, and historic allocation to white history and willful disregard for Native peoples' sovereign rights. Furthermore, while each visitor is given a "Native" body in which to experience the ride, the guests maintain their Anglo names. However, there are a few who "go Native" during the ride and demand to be called by Native names.

The desire for non-Native people to fantasize about being part Native or adopt Native names is a product of fictional romantic idealization and theft of Native spiritual and religious practices. This is addressed by Hausman when his character, Spencer Donald--a young white college man--tells Tallulah that his new name is Wakantaqka. In response to Spencer's adoption of his Native name, Tallulah explains,

"You can't go around renaming yourself like that!"

"Why not?"

"Just because you read a book about Lakota religion at UGA does not give you the right to go around using Lakota words for everything!"

"That's not an answer," he says.

"Look, Spencer, you can't --I mean did you just decide to give yourself the name of the Great Spirit? Divine mystery or whatever? That's what Wakan Tanka means in Lakota, right?" (297-98).

By using narratives that openly engage in the conflicts of taking names associated with Indian "ness" often seen in contemporary white culture, Hausman explains that Tallulah, "... can reinvent stories... She can help to shape her customer's minds, even if their stereotypes remain... But even when she recited the "dialogue" which she has "written," she does so within a system that is essentially fake, fraudulent, and just all around illusory."

Hausman addresses the conflict that he raises between Tallulah's responsibility to resist stereotypes as a Native woman and her need to make a living by doing a job that repeatedly forces her to engage in rigid conventions of capitalism and institutions that remain fixed on the idea of Native images. The idea that she has limited agency within the novel and the ride itself indicates that, in order to change fictional realities about Native Americans, readers need to be informed through new narratives, such as science fiction. As a semblance of the Trail of Tears, the virtual ride is a platform for change because it deconstructs delusional beliefs about Native women.



Hausman's relentless pressure on Tallulah's identity is apparent as she re-lives the atrocities of the removal with each tour she guides. Tallulah always begins her tour by letting the riders know that they are participating in a drama, a virtual ride. But for Tallulah he explains, "...it never ends. This is her one thousand one hundred and third trip through the Trail of Tears" (60). In this way, Hausman both asserts that Tallulah is obligated to "teach" white people about the Native experience on the Trail of Tears by removing the prejudicial white history of the removal but it also makes Tallulah hyper-aware of the persistent and false Native stereotypes that continue to plague contemporary Native identities despite her virtual lessons. Undermining her efforts is the establishment of the Trail of Tears or TREPP as a form of entertainment that supports capitalist appropriation and promotes inauthentic cultural exchanges. Hausman illustrates, "Over the last few decades, much has been made of the notion of 'simulation.' I wanted to play with this idea, and the world of virtual reality seemed like a natural way to do this. (For what it's worth, I think that sci-fi and speculative fiction in general—while having a "colonial" history with the West as you note—are modes of narration that lend themselves to the kinds of surrealism and mythic time that we see in so many 'tradition' stories" (Hausman). Hausman's use of the speculative fiction genre is a key factor in how much tension he can develop through his narrative in relation to Tallulah's identity as a Native woman in contemporary spatiality because there are no clearly defined parameters associated within the genre of speculative fiction.

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The genre of speculative fiction is often understood as a gateway to new understandings and alternative perceptions about our relationships with subjects and narratives residing in a fictional reality. Many of our perceptions and understandings of Native American women have been presupposed through damaging stereotypes which are figuratively constructed with the sole purpose of the degradation and devaluation of Native women. It matters not what lies behind fictional narratives that rely on the continuation of discourses of commonly held stereotypes, yet it is the perpetuation of such narratives that is being questioned by Native

American authors. Speculative fiction, often construed as a construct of the colonial pen, is inherently malleable and speaks to alternative futures that are often left to both the author's and reader's interpretation and vision. Hausman explains, "I'd like to think that it is possible to take colonial forms and reinvent them in ways that are more, dare I say it, 'authentically' indigenous. Plus, I'm not sure there are any tribal creation, migration, or wonder stories that wouldn't somewhat fall within the parameters of 'speculative fiction' if they were transcribed/translated or retold on paper" (Hausman). Hausman's statement brings forth a fundamental question regarding speculative fiction and how the act of changing or intentionality re-constructing the nature of fictional truth has the potential to transform into epistemic truths. Hausman's desire to reinvent colonial forms of narrative in an "authentically" indigenous way is, in fact, exactly what he and many other Native authors are doing. The narratives written by Native authors don't rely on indigenous or cultural content to assert Native authenticity into a text so much as the "act" of writing in Native authorship intrinsically changes the narratives from a Western imposition of identity to actively resisting external presumptions about Native identity.

Many Native American authors have been writing in response to derogatory Native stereotypes with power and integrity throughout history, yet the texts of Native authors have yet to be integrated into the academy through ethnic literary programs. The importance of developing Indigenous literature courses as well as academic majors is imperative to the holistic study of all literature and, as such, must rely on non-Western comparative theories. Western European literary theories can only benefit from the inclusion of Native and Indigenous literature generated by perspectives that are not grounded in Western epistemological ideologies. Through the engagement between the theoretical and textual nuances of non-Western literature, we are better equipped to question the relative boundaries of what we know about the active voice influencing the fallacy of doxastic evidence pertaining to Native stereotypes.

The reclamation of Native narratives in traditional literary forms and genres often addresses the sovereignty of the individual right and the tribal right to express the truth of their identity against the

constructions of Western European pedagogy. I contend that complications of capitalism and commodification substantiate the more insidious stereotypes of Native women as the Indian princess and/or squaw. It is within the genre of speculative fiction that many of these images are disrupted and questioned. Hausman explains, “In the universe that I want to create in my fiction, art can undo cultural boundaries, or at least expose these boundaries as the fabrication of insecure humans rather than as things which are impervious and permanent” (Hausman). Hausman, along with other Native authors, suggests that alternative futures and understandings are an act of resistance to hegemonic identities. Speculative fiction for Native writers has the capacity to create worlds in which the colonial lens can be manipulated. Hausman explains,

I want to believe that acts of memory can be acts of empowerment, especially if they involve reclaiming and the construction of something that has been systematically deleted and deliberately forgotten. Yet, don't they also necessitate some kind of framing, cropping, and potentially problematic inscriptions of ready-made and inherently biased ideas? (Hausman)

Hausman suggests that Native authors are writing in modes of consciousness that challenges the stereotypes that are pervasive in non-Indigenous literature. As such, there is a demand that the representation of Native women by Native authors repositions the corrective stereotypes in response to images that are deliberately appropriated by colonial and capitalist directives to dis-empower Native women. I assert that Native speculative discourses offer alternative literary theories in support of contemporary Native identity reflecting the need for scholarship and study in relation to the complexities of Native literature. Attentive scholarship is the conduit between outdated and often erroneous implications of adverse clichés of Native women to new, broad, and vital identities that are rewritten into narratives that are grounded in evolving futures. It is in the analysis of Native speculative fiction that deconstruction of colonial models develop and the transfiguration of Western ideologies and myths regarding Native histories and futures manifest.

Through the sphere of speculative fiction, Native authors have a platform of discourse to challenge ubiquitous stereotypes forming an active resistance to institutions that continue to form fictitious images of Native women. The entertainment industry operating in our capitalist society maintains hyper-conceptualized Native images through careless, misinformed novels and movies. Several derelict examples of contemporary appropriation have been produced most recently by author Stephanie Meyer in the *Twilight* series and the upcoming remake of *The Lone Ranger* to be released July 3, 2013, with the Native character Tanto being played by actor Johnny Depp. Critic Darla Antoine states in her essay, “Unethical Acts: Treating Native Men as Lurking Threat, Leaving Native Women Without Voice”,

When Native Americans are presented as characters in mainstream, dominant stories, it is rarely as sympathetic heroes or complicated, well-rounded protagonists. Instead, their presence is to provide a sense of lurking danger in the storyline. [She continues,] The result is that Native Americans are often portrayed and viewed as historic, outdated events open to public interpretation rather than as present, modern, individualized people with their own stories, emotions and fears (243).

In the end, one must ask how speculative fiction functions to dismantle deeply ingrained dogmas regarding Native women and their sovereignty over their identities. I assert that the evidence for how one might approach this question is found in Hausman’s *Riding the Trail of Tears*. Hausman’s use of science fiction in relation to his character Tallulah demands that she be honored in all her modern complexity. The character of Tallulah embodies her Indigenous ethnicity and her steadfast authorship of Native womanhood in a world that is in constant animosity towards every element of her being. Hausman asserts,

As far as empowering Tallulah herself, I wanted to make clear that there are modes of containment and surveillance on all levels of her existence. It seems to me that she has very little room for empowerment within the economic system and culture industry that pays her bills. She can reinvent stories...She can help to shape her customer’s minds, even if their stereotypes remain... But even

when she recited the “dialogue” which she has “written,” she does so within a system that is essentially fake, fraudulent, and just all around illusory (Hausman).

The modes of containment stem from the colonial consumption of Native feminine identity in order to usurp their power and authority. This occurs in the same way that modern consumerism recirculates the outdated, derogatory images and understandings of contemporary Native women. Through science fiction, Hausman invites a different perception of Native womanhood. It is a perception that is fraught with hidden agendas, dependence on systems of survival, and inherent contradictions. However, Hausman writes Tallulah as a living, active, and vital Native woman who is unequivocally rooted in the future with trans-generational ties to her past. It is in this complex model that scholarship in speculative fiction and Indigenous literature crafts alternative futures for Native women and active resistance eventually has the agency to transform ethnic and racial conceptions of Native female individuality.

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