

NATIVE AMERICAN MYSTERY, CRIME, AND DETECTIVE FICTION

by

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DEDICATION

For

Papaw

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## ABSTRACT

*Native American Mystery, Crime, and Detective Fiction* examines a range of texts, most of them Native-authored, that utilize elements of a popular and accessible literary genre: the mystery, crime, and detective story. The examined texts convey how writers fuse tribally-specific cultural elements with characteristics of mystery, crime, and detective fiction as a way to, as I argue, inform *all* readers about Native American histories, cultures, and contemporary issues. Exploring *how* Native American writers approach the genre of mystery, crime, and detective fiction is critical, since it is a sub-genre of American Indian literature that has, to date, received little scholarly attention.

This study considers eight novels and two made for TV movies that are either written by Native American writers, feature Native American characters and settings, or both. The novels and films that are analyzed represent a spectrum of mystery, crime, and detective stories: starting with the historical mysteries about the Osage Oil Murders presented by Linda Hogan and Tom Holm; to the calls to action regarding contemporary issues of justice, jurisdiction, and violence against American Indian women offered by Frances Washburn and Louise Erdrich; to the short series that invoke intricate questions about history and identity created by Louis Owens; and, finally, to Tony Hillerman's immensely popular hard-boiled Navajo tribal policemen who are brought to the small screen by Chris Eyre, where the distinctions between Western and Indigenous conceptions of healing and spiritual belief are highlighted. These novels and films illustrate a range of American Indian mystery, crime, and detective fiction, and my analysis illuminates the ways in which these texts work to inform and transform readers in regard to issues that surround crime and justice within American Indian contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

In the personal statement I crafted for my application to the University of Arizona's PhD program in American Indian Studies, I articulated my goal of conducting scholarship that gives American Indian literature the attention it deserves, and to do so in a respectful way that acknowledges the historical, political, and cultural facets that rest behind the creation of American Indian literature. I also set out with the intention to break the cycle I had experienced of never having read American Indian literature in my K-12, and even undergraduate, educational experiences, in order to ensure that future generations have a more informed exposure, and that Native-authored works are no longer marginalized. My journey has led me to the exploration of American Indian mystery, crime, and detective fiction, a specific sub-genre of American Indian literature that has, to date, received little scholarly or critical attention.

The goal of this study aligns with the goal Louis Owens states for his book *Other Destinies*, in which he writes, "This study is a modest attempt to further introduce novels by American Indian authors to the wider audience they deserve and to make readers more aware that for fiction about Indians they can go directly to Indian authors rather than to the immense American library of fiction about Indians by Euramerican writers" (22). While there are many mystery, crime, and detective novels *about* American Indians that are written by non-Native authors, so too are there mystery, crime, and detective novels written *by* American Indian authors. In order to fill the gap in the current scholarship, this study examines the characteristics of mystery, crime, and detective fiction written *by* American Indian writers. While there is much discussion on the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of texts written by cultural outsiders vs. those written by cultural insiders, there is little research that actually examines the specific

characteristics of Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective fiction, and this dissertation explores a range of such texts, considering some of the common features as well as how these texts differ from those authored by non-Native writers.

In the article, “Storytelling: The Heart of American Indian Scholarship,” Frances Washburn writes that “American Indian literature can and should provide pleasurable reading experiences and offer a gateway for Native and non-Native people to understanding the very issues that need to be exposed to wider public view, discussed, and resolved” (110). In general, Native American literature has the power to inform and transform readers, and the same idea applies to American Indian mystery, crime, and detective fiction. Gina Macdonald and Andrew Macdonald claim that detective stories are a means of consciousness-raising, whether in regard to pathologies such as delinquency, drug abuse, and violence, or in terms of the failures of law enforcement, such as the lack of justice, among other various issues (*Shaman or Sherlock* 6). They write that “The hard-boiled American genre has usually illuminated social justice questions directly or indirectly” (*Shaman or Sherlock* 6). Mystery stories from Native American writers certainly invoke questions of social justice, as, for example, both Washburn’s *Elsie’s Business* and Erdrich’s *The Round House* do. Both texts shed light on the topic of violence against Native women, and it could be argued that *The Round House*, which was published in 2012, had a significant impact on the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 2013. This example shows how foregrounding specific issues facing Native peoples and communities help to inform, transform, and raise the consciousness of *all* readers. Because crime and detective fiction urges readers to imagine society in situations of upheaval and violence, American Indian-authored detective fiction has the power to inform and transform readers in regard to historical, legal, cultural, and contemporary issues in Indian Country. Unfortunately,

Native American issues are often unknown or misconceived by mainstream society and crime and detective fiction written by Native people can help elucidate and illuminate some of the specific issues facing Native American individuals and communities.

In addition to informing and transforming readers, mystery, crime, and detective fiction is worthy of scholarly analysis because of the mass popularity of the genre. In the introduction to *Diversity and Detective Fiction*, Kathleen Gregory Klein writes “20 to 22 percent of all books sold in the United States are some form of mystery or detective fiction” (2). Furthermore, in *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, Heather Worthington states that crime fiction “exceeds all other genres of fiction in popularity, even romance. More crime fiction is bought for and borrowed from libraries than any other genre of fiction” (ix). Because of the popularity of the genre, crime and detective novels “are considered familiar, accessible, and unthreatening by readers who might be resistant to other texts” (Klein 2). Coupled with the popularity and accessibility of this genre, “much contemporary detective fiction explores issues of cultural interaction . . . as it moves through the investigation of serious crime” (Klein 2). Thus, it is imperative to examine Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective fiction to uncover the ways these texts inform, transform, and raise the consciousness of readers. Ultimately, I argue that in using a fictional format that has the potential to reach wide audiences, American Indian authors are using this genre to inform as well as transform readers.

Before discussing how American Indian authors are utilizing the mystery, crime, and detective genre, a brief overview of the genre’s literary history is important. In terms of the genre’s origination, Rosemary Herbert states that “A loose interpretation of the attributes of crime and mystery writing can locate the origins of the genre whenever human communities first turned their gaze upon the issues of evil and morality” (210-11). The exact moment this occurred

could certainly be contested; however, whether a culture relied upon oral tradition or on physical writings to disseminate information, it is safe to say that the diversity of human communities possessed standards and protocol to address issues of evil and morality, and, thus, stories from particular communities contained such themes. From there, the official formation of the genre began in 1841, with the publication of Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in *Graham's Magazine*. As Herbert notes, "No history of crime and mystery writing challenges the premier place accorded to Edgar Allan Poe" (212). Poe's stories "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842) and "The Purloined Letter" (1845) continued the genre and helped establish some of the typical conventions of the narrative style, such as the presence of a detective and the notion that the "detective's mind can explicate the most puzzling events with a chain of cause and effect" (Herbert 212). Despite Poe's contemporary premier status in the history of the genre, his stories did not instantly create imitators; part of this may relate to the form in which the stories were presented—whether as a short story in a magazine or in a dime novel, or as a longer narrative in book form (Herbert 212). As a result, as Herbert notes, "crime and mystery writing followed several streams of development" (213). Another important figure in the history of the genre is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) is the detective novel in which Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson first appear, which paved the way for many more tales and contemporary adaptations continue to flourish. As time passed, there became more development in American and British iterations of the genre, and from the 1900s to the 1960s, there came more innovation, such as through the use of the private eye and the introduction of novels more focused on crime than detection (Herbert 215-16). During the 1970s-1990s came diversification of the genre, such as through the introduction of non-white characters and detectives, such as

black characters portrayed by Walter Mosley, in addition to more female sleuths, and, more generally, the introduction of the “ethnic” sleuth.

The last twenty to thirty years of publishing has seen a proliferation of mystery novels that feature “ethnic” sleuths, and the American Indian detective is no exception; with the increase of “ethnic” sleuths has come an increase in scholarship on crime and detective fiction, particularly in regard to the portrayal of “ethnic” detectives. While these stories possess many of the traditional elements of crime and detective fiction—such as the presence of a crime, a criminal, a victim, and a detective—they also encourage readers to examine issues facing particular racial and ethnic communities in the United States. With this being said, even though there has been an increase in scholarship that examines the functions of the “ethnic” sleuth, scholarship about the Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective story is sparse, and the distinction is important, because as John K. Donaldson notes, “the authors of major detective fiction with Native American protagonists are not themselves Indian, full or mixed-blood” and that Native-authored mysteries do not always feature an American Indian detective (114).

In thinking about the distinction between the Native American detective and the Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective novel, an important point from Louis Owens comes to mind. Owens writes, “Prior to *House Made of Dawn*, most fiction about American Indians had been written by non-Indian authors” in which the Native is made “to reflect the psychic cravings of the colonialist—for the most part Indian characters in American fiction bear very little resemblance to the human beings who, whether living on a reservation or in urban centers, identify with the many tribal cultures on this continent” (23-4). Owens’s point is important since Native American detectives have been around as early as the dime novels of the 1880s, but that such depictions have come from non-Native writers. In these early stories, the Native American

sleuth was often depicted with “tracking skills involving close observation of nature, the ‘reading’ of forest and trail, and survival in the wilderness” (*Shaman or Sherlock* 2).<sup>1</sup> Clearly, such depictions come from the perspective of non-Native authors, and such characterizations support Owens’s assertion about non-Native portrayals reflecting the psychic cravings of the colonialist.

Despite the existence of Native American sleuths in the 1880s, these characters disappeared from fiction for a while and “not until 1946 did another Native detective appear, and then only in a short story: Manly Wade Wellman’s ‘A Star for a Warrior’” (*Shaman or Sherlock* 2). Wellman’s short story appeared in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine* and was also the recipient of the first annual prize for the best short story of the year contest sponsored by the magazine (Pronzini and Greenberg 26).<sup>2</sup> With the publication of the story, *Ellery Queen* stated that David Return, the main character of the story, “investigates not as a white man but as an Indian steeped in Red Man’s lore; and his deductions arise out of deep understanding of Indian character, tradition, and ceremonials. Indeed, David Return is the first truly American detective to appear in print” (qtd. in Pronzini and Greenberg, 26). *Ellery Queen’s* praise is interesting to consider, particularly within the context of the details of the story; the main character, David Return, is a tribal policeman for an imaginary tribe called the Tsuchah and the plot of Wellman’s story certainly prove Owens’s point about non-Native depictions of the Native being made to “reflect the psychic cravings of the colonialist” (24). In the story, the mystery revolves around

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<sup>1</sup> These specific texts are *Phil Scott, the Indian Detective: A Tale of Startling Mysteries* (1882) by Judson R. Taylor; *Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective, or the Taos Tiger* (1884) by T.C. Harbaugh; *Red Renard, The Indian Detective, or The Gold Buzzards of Colorado: a romance of the mines and dead trails* (1886) by Buffalo Bill; and *Pawnee Tom, or, Adrift in New York: A Story of an Indian Boy Detective* (1896) by Old Sleuth.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the warm reception to Wellman’s story, he never brought the main character from “A Star for a Warrior” back in any other stories.

the murder of a young, attractive, White anthropologist woman, and the suspects that David encounters are all Native and all members of his own tribe. The ending reveals that, of course, one of those Native men killed this young non-Native woman. The dynamics of this story, in particular the characters who inhabit the roles of detective, victim, and criminal, certainly communicate a story that non-Native, particularly white, readers would accept. Even though the detective, or hero, is Native, the victim is a white woman and the villain is a savage Native man. This formulaic plot is prevalent in a lot of pieces of American literature penned by non-Native writers, and proves the point that examining mystery, crime, and detective fiction written by Native American writers is critical.

After another lull, the Native American sleuth came back with vigor in the 1970s. In particular, three non-Native authors began depicting the Native sleuth, and all three authors set their stories in the southwestern United States. Brian Garfield portrayed Arizona state trooper, Sam Watchman, who is Navajo, in *Relentless* (1972) and *The Threepersons Hunt* (1974). Richard Martin Stern depicted mixed-blood Apache police chief, Johnny Ortiz, set in the Santa Fe area, starting with *Murder in the Walls* (1971) and ending with *Interloper* (1990), for a total of seven books in the series. Tony Hillerman's Navajo tribal policemen, Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee began with *The Blessing Way* (1970), which paved the way for seventeen more books in the series, ending with *The Shape Shifter* (2006). With the rapid increase of the American Indian detective came more scholarship on this phenomenon; however, the writers who introduced the American Indian detective to mainstream readers are, for the most part, non-Native.

The Native American detective, as depicted by non-Native writers, often exists as a symbol of exoticism, with "Indian lands and cultures provid[ing] rich and complex background

for authors who are interested merely in telling good stories and providing entertainment” (Browne 9). As a result, these texts do not always highlight specific historical or contemporary issues facing Native peoples and communities, and cultural elements embedded in the texts are often limited to vague mystical powers, instead of tribally-specific cultural practices. In other words, these authors tell a story with Native American characters who could be changed out for non-Native characters without affecting the overall narrative. While some non-Native authors do their best to accurately present Native American detectives—and have certainly written texts worthy of analysis—Native American detectives depicted by Native American authors are unlikely to be mere tokens of exoticism. Therefore, the analysis of Native-authored texts reveals how Native American authors have taken a genre with a formulaic plot and infused it with details about Native American life, history, and culture. Crime and detective fiction is “ripe for innovation with authors delicately working out the balance between what remains the same and what might conceivably be different” (Klein 1). This dissertation more generally explores *how* Native American writers approach the genre of mystery, crime, and detective fiction, as well as how they portray Native American detectives.

Since this dissertation works as a survey of Native-authored mysteries, not *all* Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective fiction will be explored. As that is the case, I will take the time now to briefly discuss some of the Native-authored novels within the genre not specifically discussed in the study. To start, the topics of crime and criminal behavior have been frequent themes in Native American literature, although such themes do not always necessitate the requisite process of detection, which exclude them from being technically categorized as mystery or detective fiction. For example, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta the Celebrated California Bandit* (1854) by John Rollin Ridge (Cherokee) depicts a Mexican outlaw to highlight

concerns about forced removal, foregrounding crime, but not conforming to the mystery or detective genre. Other novels utilize murder to convey issues in Indian communities, such as *The Surrounded* (1936) by D'Arcy McNickle (member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes), *House Made of Dawn* (1968) by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), and *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), to name a few, but, again, such stories lack the required detective and process of detection to be classified within the mystery, crime, and detective genre.

In addition to the many Native-authored texts that foreground crime, there are many novels that do conform to the mystery, crime, and detective genre. Todd Downing (Choctaw) wrote mysteries in the 1930s set in Mexico and the US Southwest, featuring Customs Agent Hugh Rennert as the detective, which started with *Murder on Tour* (1933) and was followed by eight more books. Martin Cruz Smith (Yaqui-Senecu del Sur) has penned several mysteries set in the former Soviet Union, such as *Gorky Park* (1981), *Polar Star* (1989), and *Red Square* (1992)—which all feature the Russian police investigator Arkady Renko. Downing and Smith serve as examples of Native American authors writing in the mystery genre who do not always employ American Indian characters, although some of Smith's other mystery novels are more clearly concerned with Native American themes such as *Nightwing* (1977) and *Stallion Gate* (1986). Robert J. Conley (Cherokee), has penned multiple mystery novels, one for example is *Wilder and Wilder* (1988). William Sanders (Cherokee) has written a series featuring a Western writer, Taggart Roper, as a detective beginning with *The Next Victim* (1993) and has more recently published *Smoke* (2002), a mystery that features amateur detective Hosea Smoke, who is Cherokee. Mardi Oakley Medawar (Cherokee) has also penned mysteries, such as *Death At Rainy Mountain* (1996) and *Murder at Medicine Lodge* (1999). Other writers like Sherman

Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene), Anna Lee Walters (Pawnee/Otoe-Missouria), and Ron Querry (Choctaw), to name a few, have also written novels that can be categorized within the mystery, crime, and detective genre. To see a more comprehensive list of Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective novels, please reference Appendix A. This dissertation specifically explores texts by Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Tom Holm (Cherokee/Muskogee Creek), Louise Erdrich (Anishinaabe), Frances Washburn (Lakota/Anishinaabe), Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee), Tony Hillerman (non-Native), and Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho).

The existing scholarship that served as the point of departure for this study consists of a mix of sources that discuss the “ethnic” detective, the American Indian detective, American Indian literature, and mystery, crime, and detective fiction in general; one important distinction to address is that few sources attempted to discuss the American Indian-authored mystery, crime, and detective *novel*, since the majority of sources focus on the identity of the portrayed detective. This is an important distinction because, for the most part, the existing scholarship largely focuses on American Indian detectives as portrayed by non-Native writers, rather than American Indian writers working within the genre of mystery, crime, and detective fiction. While this fact, in and of itself, is not necessarily surprising—considering what Owens says about American literature and American Indians—it was remarkable to see just how many non-Native authors use the American Indian detective as a token character. As evidenced by the sources below, a current gap in the literature exists: only a few sources discussed mystery, crime, and detective novels written by Native American authors.

*Diversity and Detective Fiction* (1999), edited by Kathleen Gregory Klein, is a collection of essays that broadly focuses on the role of the ethnic detective, and how such texts can teach cultural diversity in the classroom and to a general reading audience (2). Included in this

collection is an article entitled “Ethnic Detectives in Popular Fiction: New Directions for an American Genre,” by Gina Macdonald and Andrew Macdonald. The article discusses a variety of ethnic detectives and considers the implications embedded in the popularity of such novels; Macdonald and Macdonald contend that “non-mainstream detectives explore cultural differences—in perception, in way of life, in visions of the world—and act as links between cultures, interpreting each to each, mainstream to minority and minority to mainstream” (60). Their main argument centers around categorizing writers and their works in regard to the supposed relationship the writers have to the culture(s) they are depicting. The issue with these categories is that throughout the article Macdonald and Macdonald typically cite examples of ethnic detectives that are written by writers who do not belong to those particular ethnic groups, or, in other words, writers who are cultural outsiders. For example, they spend a lot of time discussing Native American detectives, but all of the examples provided come from non-Native authors: Chelsea O. Yarbrow, J.F. Trainor, Tony Hillerman, and Abigail Padgett. The only other article in this collection that specifically discusses Native American detectives is the piece entitled “Dana Stabenow’s Alaska Mysteries,” by Mary Jean DeMarr. DeMarr’s thesis contends that Stabenow’s mysteries, which feature a female Alaskan Native detective, specifically Aleut, promote multicultural education and DeMarr examines the ways in which Stabenow’s mysteries “may be useful in helping students understand some of the difficulties faced by members of minorities in the United States” (114). While this may very well be true, it also must be acknowledged that Stabenow herself is non-Native, and DeMarr fails to consider this fact.

*Shaman or Sherlock: The Native American Detective* (2002) by Gina Macdonald and Andrew Macdonald, along with MaryAnn Sheridan, is one of the only existing texts that specifically examines the Native American detective. The book analyzes Native American

detectives based on region, and includes chapters on the southwest, the northwest, Alaska & Canada, as well as the east coast and the Great Lakes region. While this text is likely the most comprehensive study of Native American detectives currently available, the book falls short, in that, like the other resources available, it focuses mostly on Native detectives portrayed by non-Native writers. Even so, the text provides helpful analysis. In the introduction, Macdonald and Macdonald state that “The Native American as a detective or an important player in a detective story is thus ideally situated by long tradition to foreground the many injustices plaguing Indian communities” (6). Macdonald and Macdonald then provide a list of some of the most major and common issues they have seen in texts with Native American detectives; they delineate issues of religion, politics, law, theft/fraud, culture, and ecology as some of the social and cultural issues embedded in such texts. This list provides a starting point for some of the issues to investigate within Native-authored detective and crime fiction. Finally, the implication of the title—*Shaman or Sherlock*—seems somewhat problematic in that it reduces Native American detectives to either a person with spiritual/mystical/healing abilities *or* a detective, which seems to be an oversimplification, as well as a false dichotomy, and does not necessarily apply to the Native American detectives portrayed by Native authors.

*Sleuthing Ethnicity: The Detective in Multiethnic Crime Fiction* (2003), edited by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Monika Mueller, is another collection of essays that examines specific examples of ethnic detectives, paying particular attention to questions about what the term “‘ethnicity’ designates and ‘how ethnic’ a detective stemming from a nondominant population group actually has to be in order to represent cultural alterity—or if s/he is even obliged to represent alterity within ‘mainstream’ culture at all” (11-12). In the introduction Fischer-Hornung and Mueller discuss the “sleuths of Native American detective fiction,” which

proves the point that within the current scholarship there are issues with terms; Fischer-Hornung and Mueller say they are discussing “Native American detective fiction,” and proceed to discuss works by Tony Hillerman, Dana Stabenow, and Aimee and David Thurlo, all of whom are non-Native. At least Fischer-Hornung and Mueller acknowledge that many of the recent novels discussed in the collection “are authored by cultural outsiders, who . . . carefully attempted to avoid stereotypical references to the ethnicities portrayed in their novels” (13). However, one of the collection’s included articles *does* examine Native-authored mystery, crime and detective fiction. In “‘Crime Spirit:’ The Significance of Dreams and Ghosts in Three Contemporary Native American Crime Novels,” Esther Fritsch and Marion Gymnich, analyze the functions of dreams and ghosts in *The Sharpest Sight* (1992) and *Bone Game* (1994), both by Louis Owens, as well as in *Indian Killer* (1996) by Sherman Alexie. Ultimately, Fritsch and Gymnich argue that in using dreams and ghosts in prominent ways, Owens and Alexie “modify the genre of crime fiction in a way that validates Native American cultures and alternative concepts of reality” (205). In validating Native American worldviews, Owens and Alexie also subvert typical detective genre conventions, specifically via “denying the reader the satisfaction of a neat solution and by foregrounding the supposedly supernatural” (220). The article does a good job of pointing out specific examples of dreams and ghosts, as well as acknowledging some of the culturally-specific elements in the texts, but it falls short in examining some of the larger implications set forth by these stories.

Another article included in *Sleuthing Ethnicity* is “Uncovering Collective Crimes: Sally Morgan’s *My Place* as Australian Indigenous Detective Narrative” by Russell West. This article juxtaposes the popular mysteries penned by Arthur Upfield, a non-Aboriginal author, which feature the part-Aboriginal detective inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, with *My Place*, the

autobiography of Sally Morgan, who is Aboriginal. This is one of the few existing articles that takes the time to examine the issues presented in a cultural outsider's text next to a text written by a cultural insider. West's approach is unique, since *My Place* is neither fiction, nor technically a mystery, crime, or detective novel, but he chooses to analyze its conventions as if it were a detective narrative anyway; truly, *My Place* is an autobiography that mostly focuses on the "Stolen Generation," a term coined to refer to Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their parents under the white government policy until the mid-1970s" (281). West notes that there is a dissonance between "narrative resolution of crimes against Indigenous peoples ... and the real continuation of a historical process of expropriation and discrimination" and that such concepts must be reconciled, particularly within the context of Indigenous detective fiction (294). West successfully makes the point that such notions aren't always explored in texts by cultural outsiders.

In the book *Murder on the Reservation: American Indian Crime Fiction: Aims and Achievements* (2004), Ray B. Browne notes, "In the rapidly developing field of literature by and about Native Americans, ethnic crime fiction is a vigorous genre. In many ways this genre develops in the tradition of crime fiction in general, but it necessarily incorporates new materials and people in their own settings and cultures" (3). Browne immediately makes it clear that despite the title of the book and its supposed focus on American Indian crime fiction, it is like many of the other sources in the sense that the majority of Browne's book discusses Native American detectives portrayed by non-Native authors. However, in addition to discussing writers like Tony Hillerman, Dana Stabenow, and Aimee & David Thurlo, Browne does include Louis Owens and Mardi Oakley Medawar. The book is divided into chapters which focus on the authors, summaries of their respective mystery novels, brief discussions of the portrayed

characters, the aesthetics of the texts, and interviews with the writers—creating a somewhat disjointed examination of American Indian crime fiction. This text is useful in providing information and analyses of texts by non-Native writers, as well as in providing some information and analysis of the works of Owens and Oakley Medawar.

In the article “Native American Sleuths: Following in the Footsteps of the Indian Guides?” (2001) John K. Donaldson’s main argument revolves around whether the recent employment of Native American detectives by non-Native authors repeats the stereotypes and issues embedded in the commonly-deployed trope of the Indian guide. Ultimately, Donaldson’s answer is no, because these Native American detectives typically serve as the main characters and do not perpetuate the role of the Indian guide. Donaldson’s article mostly focuses on texts by non-Native authors, although he does take the time to acknowledge a few detective stories penned by Native American authors, such as *Indian Killer* by Sherman Alexie, *The Sharpest Sight*, *Bone Game*, and *Nightland* by Louis Owens, the work of Martin Cruz Smith, as well as the books by Mardi Oakley Medawar. Ultimately, Donaldson finds that texts authored by non-Natives are very different from the texts authored by Native authors and one way in which they differ is that non-Native authors cast Native American detectives who specifically work as mediators between “mainstream” and Native communities, while Native authors do not. In addition, while non-Native authored texts typically align with more “traditional” detective stories, and have similar commonalities as a genre in and of itself, the texts authored by Native American writers are not so easy to categorize, leaving Donaldson to essentially dismiss these texts.

The dissertation entitled *Detecting Colonialism: Detective Fiction in Native American and Sardinian literatures* (1998) by Antonio G. Idini takes a specific look at the role of

colonialism in mystery novels of Sardinian and Native American origin; in terms of the latter, Idini looks at the works of Louis Owens, specifically *The Sharpest Sight*, *Bone Game*, and *Nightland*. Idini contends that Sardinian and Native American authors utilize detective fiction to provide commentary on the discourse of colonization and Idini points out how such authors do so through subversive deployment of detectives, the gathering of information, and the solution.

Several other texts exist that discuss the “ethnic sleuth” but that do not consider the role of the Native American detective or only do so in a minimal way. One example is *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective* (2006), edited by Christine Matzke and Susanne Muhleisen. This text is a collection of essays that examines stories in postcolonial settings that feature either a “figurative rather than a literal interpretation of crime” or “use specific criminal acts to explore the state of a postcolonial nation” (8). *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity* (2010) by Stephen Knight, discusses diversity of detectives but focuses on black male detectives and black female detectives, and only briefly mentions detectives of other ethnicities. In regard to the Native American sleuth, Knight provides a short discussion of Hillerman, followed by a list of authors who portray Native detectives, and to Knight’s credit, he lists both non-Native and Native authors; in terms of the latter, he specifically mentions Linda Hogan’s *Mean Spirit*, Louis Owens’s *The Sharpest Sight*, and Carol Lafavor’s *Evil Dead Center* (196). However, beyond these brief mentions, there is no further discussion of the Native American sleuth or the Native American detective story. In *Fiction, Crime, and Empire* (1993), Jon Thompson considers the fact that “Ours is a culture fascinated with crime” and traces the evolution of the mystery, crime, and detective story from the emergence of the detective hero, to the role of empire, to modernist detectives, and finally to postmodern crime fiction; however, there is no mention of the Native American detective (1).

Because of the current lack of scholarship on Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective fiction, this dissertation is valuable to American Indian Studies (AIS) due to its focus on a particular area (and sub-genre) within American Indian literature. In addition, this project is also useful since examines how these texts employ depictions of upheaval and violence to inform, transform, and raise the consciousness of *all* readers. This is significant because, unfortunately, legal, cultural, historical, and contemporary American Indian issues are often unknown to or misunderstood by mainstream American society. Using a genre with mass appeal, popularity, and accessibility provides Native American authors a platform to debunk some of the existing misconceptions. Furthermore, because the majority of the existing scholarship focuses on Native American detectives written by non-Native writers, the current conversations regarding Native Americans and mystery, crime, and detective fiction is reminiscent of what Louis Owens calls “literary colonization” (*Other Destinies* 23). Owens writes, “Prior to *House Made of Dawn*, most fiction about American Indians had been written by non-Indian authors in a process that resembled literary colonization” (*Other Destinies* 23). Instead of perpetuating such a notion, this dissertation takes the time to focus on mystery, crime, and detective novels by American Indian authors, and to raise awareness about these texts and the messages embedded in them.

Owens also writes that “Indian writers today have come to expect, even demand, that readers learn something about the mythology and literary (oral) history of Native Americans” (*Other Destinies* 29). This dissertation contributes to American Indian Studies, as well as to the greater body of human knowledge, because examining Native American mystery, crime, and detective fiction forces individuals to learn more about legal, cultural, historical, and contemporary American Indian issues. Focusing on such a popular and accessible genre will not

only attract more readers, but it will force them to learn about various aspects of AIS. Raising awareness of such topics is critical because, as Washburn writes, “As long as the demographic of American Indians in the United States remains as small as it is in comparison to the mainstream population, then Indian people need to make allies” (“Storytelling” 116). Research about Native American mystery, crime, and detective fiction foregrounds historical and contemporary issues and has the potential to teach readers about contemporary situations and the historical conditions from which these situations emerged; as a result, readers, especially non-Native readers, “might be more likely to look favorably on Indian issues that come before them in the course of their careers” (“Storytelling” 116).

In total, this project considers eight novels penned by six different authors and two films, both directed by the same individual. Chapter one, “Historicizing Native American Mystery, Crime, and Detective Fiction: A Case Study of *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose*” examines how *Mean Spirit* by Linda Hogan and *The Osage Rose* by Tom Holm utilize elements of the mystery, crime, and detective fiction genre to raise readers’ consciousness about a true historical event: the Osage Oil Murders. The novels mirror each other in terms of four specific characteristics associated with the mystery and detective genre: the opening, the detectives, the forms of reasoning, and the resolution. Both novels open with the mysterious murder of a Native person, both stories depict a Native American detective who comes from a tribal community other than the Osage, both detectives use cultural knowledge and practices to help solve the crimes, and finally, both novels end with retaliatory killings as forms of justice. Integral to both stories are Indigenous practices, which Hogan and Holm weave into the texts to convey how such worldviews are part and parcel of the community and the forms of detection needed to work within that community.

The second chapter, “Violence Against Native American Women: Elements of Mystery, Crime, and Detective Fiction in *Elsie’s Business* and *The Round House*” demonstrates how Native American authors use the mystery, crime, and detective genre to not only raise awareness, but to also make a call to action about contemporary issues in Indian Country. In regard to *Elsie’s Business* by Frances Washburn and *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich, the specific call to action concerns working to reduce the high rate of violence, particularly sexual assault, against Native American women. The texts mirror one another in terms of the crime committed, the detective, the forms of detection, and the enactment of justice. Both novels feature: the physical and sexual assault of a Native American woman; accidental amateur sleuths who are part of parent-child relationships with the victim; reasoning that requires understanding of Indigenous worldviews as well as of Federal Indian law; and, finally, enactments of justice that are inherently tied to tribally-specific beliefs. Again, Washburn and Erdrich integrate Indigenous beliefs with conventions of mystery, crime, and detective fiction to raise readers’ consciousness about violence against Native American women, in order to make a call for change.

Chapter three, “Mysteries of the Past and the Present in Louis Owens’s *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*” shows how Owens overlays the traditional whodunit tale with subtler, but larger mysterious questions about personal identity, colonization, and American history. In both books, Owens presents a “simple plot” in which murder is committed and desire to solve it exists; happening simultaneously, the books’ main character, Cole McCurtain, struggles with understanding his own mixed-blood identity, colonization, and American history, and how such concepts affect issues of the present. In each book, Cole must rely on a team of sleuths comprised of family and friends to investigate as well as to provide important cultural information. Both novels foreground the idea that crimes and mysteries of the present are

irrevocably tied up with events of the past. Owens combines mystery, crime, and detective fiction elements with tribally-specific cultural information, as well as questions about identity, colonization, and American history, to convey how American Indians continue to struggle with the ramifications of crimes of the past.

The fourth, and final, chapter, “The Novels of Tony Hillerman and the Films of Chris Eyre: Examining *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time*” presents a departure from the other chapters in this project, since it considers non-Native writer Tony Hillerman, as well as film adaptations of his work. Since Hillerman is often cited as the most well known writer to cast the Native American detective, it would be remiss to exclude him from this study, despite his non-Native identity. Hillerman’s depictions of Navajo tribal policemen Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee utilize many of the traditional and hardboiled conventions of mystery, crime and detective fiction, but Hillerman’s fusion of such characteristics with Navajo cultural elements, including a foregrounding of place with the Navajo Nation playing a prominent role in all of his texts, makes his work ripe for this study, and serves as a point of comparison for Native-authored texts. Adding an additional layer are Chris Eyre’s film adaptations, which conform to and deviate from Hillerman’s source texts in different ways and, most importantly, represent a reclamation of Hillerman’s stories since the films are directed by a Native director, and star a Native cast, with Adam Beach as Officer Chee and Wes Studi as Lieutenant Leaphorn. Such widely distributed and consumed pieces of storytelling, like Hillerman’s novels and Eyre’s adaptations, draw readers and viewers by virtue of the popularity of the genre, but also work to raise awareness about Native American life and present both diverse and positive representations of Native American peoples, specifically the Navajo, to many readers and viewers across the nation, and even the world.

Finally, it is important to note the terms used in this work; as much as possible, I attempt to be tribally-specific when speaking about specific writers or particular aspects of the texts. However, when speaking generally about the genre, I have interchangeably used the terms Native American, Native, American Indian, and sometimes, Indigenous; this is a result of the terminology used in some of the existing scholarship, and from the desire to connote different meanings. For example, Native American and American Indian most specifically refer to peoples of the United States, while Native or Indigenous refer more broadly to indigenaeity, spanning national boundaries.

## I. HISTORICIZING NATIVE AMERICAN MYSTERY, CRIME, AND DETECTIVE FICTION: A CASE STUDY OF *MEAN SPIRIT* AND *THE OSAGE ROSE*

One goal of Native American writers working within the mystery, crime, and detective fiction genre is to raise readers' consciousness by shedding light on issues facing Native peoples and communities, and the foregrounding of specific historical events serves as one example of how Native writers achieve this goal. Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* (1990) and Tom Holm's *The Osage Rose*<sup>3</sup> (2008) both focus on a string of murders of Native Americans in Oklahoma during the 1920s, known as the Osage Oil Murders. Not only do Hogan and Holm take inspiration from actual events, but both writers also infuse elements of mystery, crime, and detective fiction into their novels—using the conventions of a popular and accessible genre to intrigue and inform readers. *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* mirror each other in terms of four characteristics: the opening, the detectives, the forms of reasoning, and the resolution. Both novels open with the mysterious murder of a Native person; both novels employ a Native American detective that comes from a tribal community outside of the Osage; both detectives utilize cultural practices and knowledge to help them solve the crimes; and, finally, both novels end with retaliatory killings as a form of justice. While Hogan and Holm weave distinctly different narratives, discussing the similarities presented in the novels adds to the scholarship surrounding the concept of the Native American sleuth, and provides specific examples of how Hogan and Holm indigenize the genre.

Since both *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* deal with historical events, some contextual information is helpful for understanding how Hogan and Holm use elements of mystery, crime,

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<sup>3</sup> *Anadarko*, the sequel to *The Osage Rose*, was published in 2015. *Anadarko* is set in the aftermath of the Tulsa Race Riots of 1921 and features the same protagonists as *The Osage Rose*, J.D. Daugherty and Hoolie Smith.

and detective fiction. According to the FBI, between the years 1921 and 1923 many members of the Osage Tribe died under suspicious circumstances (United States). Contemporary studies estimate that between two-hundred and two-hundred and fifty individuals suffered mysterious deaths, resulting from a range of methods, such as from “bombs, pushing from a train, poison, ground glass, shotguns, exposure and with almost every weapon imaginable from knives to wrenches to dynamite” (Strickland 43). But why were the Osage targeted and how did the killers get away with these murders? The story of the Osage Oil Murders, like many other atrocities waged against Native Americans, begins with the actions of the U.S. federal government. Like many other Native Nations, the Osage were removed after the Civil War, and in their case it was from Kansas to what is now Oklahoma (Strickland 39).

In 1872, the Osage Tribe’s reservation in north central Indian Territory was confirmed by Congress, and by 1896, an oil and gas lease of the entire reservation was executed (Strickland 39). When oil was discovered on Osage land, the mineral regulatory scheme that was developed “was the most complex ever devised by Indian policymakers” (Strickland 42). Part of the regulations involved the authorization of the Secretary of the Interior to issue “‘certificates of competency’ to adult Osage Indians who were ‘competent’ to manage their own restricted property” (Strickland 40). Not only did the Secretary of the Interior get to determine who was “competent,” but the regulations also set up a system in which oil rights held by an Osage person would, upon death, be transferred to that person’s spouse. This system was especially destructive to the Osage Tribe, since it “created a wealth transfer system that tempted unscrupulous whites to intermarry for the purpose of accumulating headrights through inheritance after murdering the Osage allottees” (Strickland 42).

The laws surrounding Osage oil rights failed not only because of their complexity, but also because of “the complicity of those charged with its enforcement” (Strickland 43). In the article “Osage Oil: Mineral Law, Murder, Mayhem, and Manipulation,” Strickland explains,

Never in the history of Indian policy or state government has there been such widespread and documented corruption, both civil and criminal. Osage annuitants were treated with indifference and their deaths willingly ignored by state and county officials. Furthermore, the federal trustees who were charged with supervision of the mineral estate dollars looked at the balance sheet of oil dollars and ignored the human devastation. (43)

The FBI (then called the U.S. Bureau of Investigation) became involved only after the Department of the Interior wrote to the FBI director, requesting assistance in the investigations of multiple Osage deaths (United States). Federal agents infiltrated the reservation, “posing as medicine men, cattlemen, and salesmen” and they eventually held individuals accountable for the murders (United States). One of the main culprits was a man named William Hale, who along with other individuals, was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Hale was a cattleman who had built up significant wealth and political influence on the reservation, and he was well known and popular for his personable qualities and was nicknamed “King of the Osage Hills” (Wilson 145). He took advantage of the Osage and contemporary studies suggest that he was responsible for as many as twenty murders (Fixico 27).

Despite the fact that Hale and others were apprehended and sentenced, the fact remains that this only occurred after a significant loss of life for the Osage Tribe. The greed that drove so many white Americans, particularly males, to murder Osage individuals is emblematic of older historical policies that set the precedent regarding theft of Indian lands; as a result, “the Osage murders were only slightly extended criminal versions of a process of policy that saw the Native

American as an obstacle to the proper utilization of the land” (Strickland 43). The Osage Oil Murders present a case study in “the failure of law, the failure of Indian policy and the struggle for survival of the indomitable spirit of a great Native people forced to deal with both the curse and the blessing of black gold” (Strickland 39). Both Hogan and Holm highlight the failure of the law and present the issues surrounding the Osage Oil Murders in murder-mystery formats. In *Mean Spirit*, while Hogan fictionalizes the place, she provides a depiction of a real series of murder cases. In *The Osage Rose*, on the other hand, Holm sets the story in a real place but presents fictionalized portrayals inspired by true events that occurred during these years of death and devastation for the Osage Tribe.

*Mean Spirit* by Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) is set in 1922-1923 in Oklahoma and describes both the fortunes and the murders of Osage people. The story focuses on two multigenerational Osage families, the Blankets and the Grayclouds. Grace Blanket, who has become the richest person in the Territory, is murdered at the beginning of the novel, and thereafter other members of the Graycloud family begin dying mysteriously. After much pleading by the Osage people to both the local police and the federal government, two federal officers are eventually sent to investigate the murders. One of the men is Stace Red Hawk, who is Lakota, and he not only discovers corruption, fraud, intimidation, murder, as well as the culprit, but he also finds love for fellow Native people, and all that they have overcome. In the end, even though two trials are held and a murderer is imprisoned, justice is not so easily restored for the Osage people.

Hogan’s use of mystery, crime, and detective fiction elements combined with the historical context has caused reviewers to contemplate the categorization of this novel. For example, in a review of *Mean Spirit*, M. Annette Jaimes writes,

The mechanism which drives the book's plot bears in some ways a more than passing resemblance to the Agatha Christie thriller *One Little, Two Little, Three Little Indians* as, one by one, Indians holding title to land and oil rights are killed by various means. The main structural difference is that where Christie writes from invention, Hogan plies historically factual waters, and does so with a fine eye to accuracy. In this sense, while the form of *Mean Spirit* may be that of a mystery, its genre is actually that of an historical novel. And in this genre, it must stand as an achievement of the very first rank. (54)

Jaimes's desire to prioritize the genre of *Mean Spirit* as an historical novel, and to praise its achievements in that genre, provides a good point of departure for this chapter and how the analysis of mystery, crime, and detective fiction elements is important in illuminating the historical injustices presented in the story. As a result, the categorization of *Mean Spirit* should not be one or the other—mystery or history. Instead, *Mean Spirit* inhabits multiple genre spaces: mystery, crime, and detective fiction, and historical fiction, as well as Native American literature. To attempt to disentangle these different genres and their corresponding elements would be akin to pulling the book apart, disrupting the totality of the story. A more productive analysis considers how these generic conventions overlap. While other mystery novels sometimes invoke historical events, *Mean Spirit* exemplifies how Native American authors use elements of mystery, crime, and detective fiction to communicate political messages: first, to highlight some of the specific atrocities enacted upon Native Americans, in this case the Osage, and second, to demonstrate that Native Americans are still here today and that these stories need to be told.

While set in the same time period, and in the same region as *Mean Spirit*, *The Osage Rose* by Tom Holm (Cherokee/Muscogee Creek), not only brings attention to the Osage Oil

murders, but it also sheds light on the Volstead Act and the Tulsa Race Riots. Instead of focusing on the effects of just one of these aspects of the 1920s, Holm's book examines the intersection of all three events. The book is set in Tulsa and Osage country during 1921 and features Private Investigator J.D. Daugherty, an ex-cop from the Southside of Chicago, and his associate Hoolie Smith, a Cherokee WWI veteran and mechanic, as the main sleuths. A rich, young girl, Rose Chichester, has disappeared, and her father, E.L. Chichester, has come to J.D. for help. E.L. assumes that Rose has run off with Tommy Ruffle, who is Osage, and in order to solve the case, J.D. combines his own traditional investigative skills with those of his operative, Hoolie. While J.D. remains in urban Tulsa, Hoolie heads to Osage country, and they both work from their separate places and distinct worldviews to solve this mystery. The combined skills of J.D. and Hoolie ensure the restoration of justice at the end of the novel.

Like *Mean Spirit*, reviewers of *The Osage Rose* observe both the qualities of mystery and history in the novel, and, once again, such reviews attempt to disentangle these aspects, which ultimately interferes with the unity of the narrative. *The Osage Rose* has been described as a story "that will appeal to both mystery buffs and history buffs" because it "combines a carefully detailed account of real racial and political tensions with that of two rough-and-tumble detectives on a quest for truth and justice" (Ramey). As conveyed by this reviewer's comments, the elements of mystery and history fiction work together to appeal to mass audiences *and* to inform readers about a particular moment in history. *The Osage Rose* provides another example of how Native American writers employ conventions of mystery, crime, and detective fiction to raise consciousness about a specific moment in history.

The entry for "Historical Mystery" in *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing* identifies three common ways that writers historicize the mystery genre. The first

involves the use of period and cultural scenery to create an historical setting or backdrop, such as in the example of Miriam G. Monfredo's *Seneca Falls Inheritance*, where the protagonist is a librarian whose home is Seneca Falls, New York, the site of the 1848 meeting on women's suffrage (Herbert 209). The second way writers historicize the mystery genre occurs through willingly accepting "the constraints of the historical record in order to explore actual puzzles from the past" (Herbert 209). One example of this is Edgar Allen Poe's story "The Mystery of Marie Roget," which is based on a real murder of a young woman. The final way writers historicize mystery fiction is through the use of "historical personages in fictional circumstances," such as Elliot Roosevelt's series featuring his mother Eleanor Roosevelt playing detective (Herbert 210). Of the three forms, *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* most closely align with the second type, since these novels use the historical record to explore true crime of the past. However, it is also worth noting that *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* inhabit a slightly different space because these texts not only use the historical record to explore actual puzzles from the past, but they also use the mystery genre to bring attention to a specific string of murders that are inextricably related to a much larger and more complex network of historical events: European contact, colonization, dispossession of land, assimilation, and the efforts of the U.S. federal government to eliminate Native cultures, to name a few. In this way, *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* are fundamentally different from historical mysteries written by non-Native authors, because Hogan and Holm use this genre to specifically foreground Native American history, culture, and perspectives.

To start the discussion of *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose*, the first aspect to analyze is each novel's opening. According to *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, a classic mystery plot begins with the presentation of a puzzle. This "puzzle is centered around a

significant act, like murder, which is worthy of attention of the detective and will sustain suspense for the reader” (Herbert 331). Both *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* utilize a traditional convention of mystery, crime, and detective fiction, because both novels open with a murder. Since murder is considered “a sufficiently heinous crime to sustain the attention of the reader through the long form of a novel in which the writer may develop puzzling plot twists, mysterious clues, and revelation of character, especially in regard to motive,” both Hogan and Holm use this classic technique to open their stories (Herbert 299). This convention requires introspection from the reader to try to determine “which character had the means, motive, and opportunity to perpetrate this crime” (Herbert 299).

In *Mean Spirit*, the reader is immediately introduced to Grace Blanket and her daughter Nola. Hogan wastes no time in introducing allotment, also known as the Dawes Act, a critical component of Federal Indian Law, particularly in regard to Osage oil rights. Hogan explains,

in the early 1900s each Indian had been given their choice of any parcel of land not already claimed by the white Americans. Those pieces of land were called allotments.

They consisted of 160 acres a person to farm, sell, or use in any way they desired. The act that offered allotments to the Indians, the Dawes Act, seemed generous at first glance so only a very few people realized how much they were being tricked, since numerous tracts of unclaimed land became open property for white settlers, homesteaders, and ranchers.

(8)

Hogan explains that the first bit of oil to be discovered on Indian land was discovered on Grace’s land, making her very wealthy. Shortly after this contextual information, the story moves to a Sunday morning before church, where Grace, Nola, and Rena—Nola’s friend—come together to gather water willows (11). This act in and of itself was not uncommon for Grace and the girls,

but what happened that morning was fatal. When Grace and the girls do not return in time for church, the matriarch of the family, Belle Graycloud, is worried, but is told by numerous individuals that the girls probably just lost track of time and would surely be back soon. Nola and Rena do finally return home and describe what happened. Evidently, two men in a black Buick had crept up on Grace and they had “turned their faces toward her, as if something was wrong” (23). The driver of the black Buick is revealed to be John Hale, a non-Native oilman, but the passenger remains unidentified. The men continue to stare, and after Grace instructs Nola and Rena to stay where they are, Grace takes off running. Nola and Rena, who are hidden from the men, peer over the brush to see the men catch up with Grace. The passenger of the car jumps out and “Then in day’s full light, a gunshot broke through air” (24). The girls remain where they are until they hear the car drive away; they discover that “The men placed Grace’s body behind a clump of wind-whipped black bushes,” put a pistol in her hands, and that one man had “opened a bottle of whiskey and poured it on Grace Blanket’s body, and the wind blew the smell of whiskey across the pond” (25). With this memorable scene—the seemingly inexplicable murder of Grace Blanket—Hogan presents the initial puzzle of *Mean Spirit*.

The beginning of *The Osage Rose* bears a striking similarity to the opening of *Mean Spirit*, not only in terms of presenting a puzzle, but also in terms of the nature of the murder itself. In *The Osage Rose*, Holm includes a prologue to present the puzzle, and it begins with two unidentified men negotiating the mechanics of dumping a body. The men drive out of town, turn off the road, and park next to a ditch. As the unidentified men are moving the body, the reader learns that the dead man’s “throat had been severed” and when the driver tells the passenger, in reference to the dead man, “He’s just another redskin dumped alongside the road,” it is conveyed that the dead man is a Native person (vi). The passenger then asks the driver, “You got any

whiskey in your poke?” and the passenger subsequently pours “the whiskey over the hair and rubbed some into the cheeks” of the deceased individual (vi-vii). The passenger then tells his partner, “Now, even if they find him, they’ll think he was drunk and got into a fight” (vii). In opening *The Osage Rose* with the unexplained murder of an unidentified Native American man, a murder likely committed by the two unidentified men, Holm presents the initial puzzle of the novel.

The openings of *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* mirror each other in multiple ways.<sup>4</sup> To start, both novels conform to the convention that the opening presents a puzzle, since both novels open with a mysterious murder. The additional similarities relate to the identity of the victim and the nature of the crime. In terms of the victim, both novels show the violent and seemingly purposeless murder of a Native person: Grace Blanket in *Mean Spirit* and an unidentified Native man in *The Osage Rose*. The culprits in both stories also feel the need to place whiskey at the scene of the crime, as a way to make each death appear accidental. Furthermore, in each case, the murder is carried out by two individuals—two non-Native men. While on the surface these two murders appear to conform to the mystery, crime, and detective genre, Hogan and Holm construct the openings to highlight issues of colonization, racism, and the lack of justice for Native Americans. In the mystery, crime, and detective genre, victims usually become targets for reasons relating to their personality, wealth, or for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time; Hogan and Holm nuance the motivation of the murderers, because even though the killers in these texts are motivated by wealth, they are also motivated and accommodated by the power

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<sup>4</sup> The opening of each novel, *Mean Spirit* especially, closely resembles the murder of Anna Brown, a twenty-five-year old rich Osage woman, whose body was discovered in May 1921 with a bullet in her head and a whiskey bottle near her hand (Wilson 146). Anna’s cousin, sister, brother-in-law, and servant were subsequently killed under mysterious circumstances (Wilson 146).

structure of the United States (Herbert 478). As a result, Hogan and Holm shed light on larger structural and historical injustices faced by Native people and *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* are not simply about a single crime, or even just about the Osage Oil murders, but rather about the larger historical injustices embedded in American history.

With the puzzle presented at the beginning of the novel, the classic plot structure of crime and mystery fiction then moves into the development section, where “information is gathered that enables the detective and the canny reader to solve the puzzle” (Herbert 331). So in the case of *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose*, the initial puzzle to be solved revolves around figuring out who killed Grace Blanket and who killed the unidentified Native man. A significant aspect of the development section requires at least one detective and at least one method of investigation, and according to *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, “The choice of sleuth indicates the author’s general intention” (Herbert 420). In other words, the characteristics of the detective often provide commentary on the mystery or crime to be solved. Furthermore, the detective’s identity can allow him to “not only investigate ‘mainstream’ society but [to] also enter and decode a Chinatown, ghetto, barrio, tribal homeland, or particular religious community. For the most part, these communities remain closed to most nonethnic investigators” (Herbert 139).

In *Mean Spirit*, the initial role of the detective is fulfilled by a group of sleuths: members of the Graycloud and Blanket families, as well as by Osage community members. The network of familial and community detectives conveys the effect Grace’s murder has on the community. After asking for federal assistance, the Osage sleuths gain an additional detective, Stace Red Hawk, who is Lakota and an employee of the U.S. Bureau of Investigations. Stace’s positionality as a Native person, yet not an Osage person, allows him to relate to the Osage in a way that a

non-Native detective wouldn't be able to. Similarly, in *The Osage Rose* there are multiple detectives, but the sleuth engaging with the Osage community is Hoolie Smith, who like Stace is Native, but not Osage; even though Hoolie is Cherokee, his positionality as a Native person provides him the opportunity to relate to the Osage.

*Mean Spirit* opens with Grace's murder, but the reader learns that prior to Grace's homicide, "in half a year there had been seventeen murders" (39). Initially Hogan employs a network of family and community members attempting to solve the crime and such detectives can be categorized as amateur sleuths. By definition, the amateur sleuth is an amateur because s/he has no formal training in detective work, and generally speaking, despite the lack of training, "the amateur sleuth has usually been smarter than the police" (Herbert 16). Because *Mean Spirit* focuses on two multigenerational families, the Blankets and the Grayclouds, the individuals who conduct the majority of the investigative work are the people who comprise these families, as well as other various community members. Family and community members conduct their own investigations, since for the majority of the novel, law enforcement refuses to help. In this way, Hogan's amateur sleuths conform to convention, since these individuals have more knowledge about the incidents than do the police; at the same time, Hogan also breaks from convention in initially employing familial and community members to do the investigative work. This depiction accurately represents what happened in history: law enforcement originally refused to assist the Osage, and, thus, the Osage had to investigate on their own.

While many of the characters in *Mean Spirit* act as detectives, some of the more notable individuals are Belle Graycloud, Michael Horse, and Lettie Graycloud. For example, in regard to Belle, after learning of Grace's murder, she "believed it was a plot since Grace's land was worth so much in oil. All along the smell of the blue-black oil that seeped out of the earth had smelled

like death to her” (29). Belle clearly understands *why* Grace has been murdered, but she does not pinpoint a specific suspect. Later in the novel, after a mysterious house fire kills two more people, Michael Horse exercises some detective skills as well, because he keeps a journal in which he writes “a page on every person he thought might have had a reason to put the nitro fuse in the coalbin of Benoit’s house” (78-9). Like Belle, Michael is suspicious and keeps track of possible suspects. Lettie, who is Belle’s daughter, also devotes significant time investigating. For example, at a carnival early in the novel Lettie sees a fortune-teller who tells her, “Beware. Beware. The crocodile doesn’t harm the bird that cleans his teeth for him. He eats the others but not that one” (70). Lettie believes this to be a clue and turns to similar forms of investigative inquiry throughout the novel: for instance, Lettie uses a deck of playing cards to predict what the future holds (143); she uses a Ouija board during a storm, as she thinks the weather “would heighten the energy of the spirits” (160); and, when Belle destroys Lettie’s Ouija board, Lettie paints a Ouija design on the floor (165). Neither Belle, nor Michael, nor Lettie are successful in determining the killers, but that is not for a lack of trying. Rather, all of the leads that Belle, Michael, and Lettie turn up are red herrings, “false or misleading clues” (Herbert 378).

Without much progress, the Blankets, Grayclouds, and other community members pursue their investigations, but Moses Graycloud takes it a step further, and pens a letter to the U.S. Bureau of Investigations requesting assistance with solving the murders in Osage country. Whether the Bureau is convinced by Moses’s letter in and of itself is unclear, but professional detectives eventually come to Oklahoma to investigate the numerous murders. One of the detectives is Stace Red Hawk, who is Lakota; Stace’s status as a Lakota person creates an interesting dynamic, since in one way Stace is an outsider, because he is not Osage, but at the same time, Stace is also somewhat of an insider, since he is a Native person. As a result, Stace’s

status as an “ethnic detective” provides him with the capability to relate to the Osage, despite the fact that his tribal affiliation is Lakota. Upon arriving in Oklahoma, Stace relies on traditional detective techniques to discern information, most notably the method of observation. This traditional form of reasoning originates from Edgar Allan Poe’s story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” in which the detective “reasons by inferences derived from his careful observations in order to construct the true story of a crime” (Herbert 376). Initially, Stace employs the method of observation, as there are multiple instances of Stace standing back and monitoring people. For example, at Lettie and Benoit’s wedding, Stace “looked around the church. Everyone was a suspect” (180). Shortly after the wedding, Benoit is found dead, supposedly from suicide, and at Benoit’s funeral, “Stace Red Hawk stood far behind them all, watching” (203). While Stace initially separates himself from the people of Watona, relying on traditional forms of reasoning, he eventually begins to employ alternative forms of investigation.

Stace soon becomes aware of how important it is for him to use his positionality as a Native person to gain trust from the family and community members affected by the murders. Stace initially conveys this awareness when he first arrives in Oklahoma; in order to gain trust from the Osage, he is dressed “Like most of the traveling medicine men” because “he wore black slant-heel cowboy boots and carried with him a long cedar box, a small black suitcase, and a buckskin bag” (146). As a result, “people believed [Stace] to be a younger medicine man,” which gave “Red Hawk credibility in the eyes of the local Indian community” (245). Stace not only dresses like a medicine man, but he also embeds himself into the Osage culture by attending and participating in a ceremony. Lionel Tall, a medicine person who is not Osage but is of an unidentified tribal affiliation, has come to Indian Territory to conduct a healing ceremony because “he’d heard, from his network of traditionalists, that the Oklahoma Indians were in

deeper trouble” than most suspected (213). Tall conducts “a ceremony for healing everyone, even the injured earth that had been wounded and bruised by the oil boom” (213). This particular example underscores the connection between ceremony and land; people have come together to not only heal themselves, but also the land they inhabit, because the two are inextricably intertwined. The fact that Stace’s presence at the ceremony is the first time he has direct contact with the family and community members affected by the murders emphasizes Stace’s role as a Native American detective; had Stace been a non-Native detective, he likely would not have been present at the ceremony.

Stace also infuses cultural practices from his Lakota worldview to help him uncover the assailant(s). When the reader first meets Stace, Hogan foregrounds his cultural worldview, since Hogan depicts him waking up and “offering tobacco to the four quarters of the earth. He’d been instructed by the elders to always remember the earth and the spirit people, especially now, when he was so far away from home” (50). Stace prays again later in the novel, asking for help for the Osage. As he is praying, Stace recalls that as a boy, he “knew the constellations of the older people. In the sky he saw the planets and stars take the form of eagle, wolf, and buffalo. Stace had known the man called Black Elk, who’d said that the Indians were now living in a broken circle” (205-06). With that thought, Stace “offered the pipe to the east” (206). On the surface these practices may not seem like forms of detection, but praying and engaging in various forms of spiritual practice help Stace stay balanced, and ultimately contribute to him solving the murders, since Stace’s cognizance of the broken circle motivates him to solve the crimes. Furthermore, Stace’s engagement in his own spiritual practices allows him to feel a cultural connection to the Osage people, despite being Lakota and therefore an outsider. Because of this,

Stace feels an allegiance and responsibility for solving the murders and helping the Osage people—a motivation largely driven from his own identity as a Native person.

Similar to the many detectives in *Mean Spirit*, there are several detectives operating in *The Osage Rose*. However, unlike *Mean Spirit*, the detectives in *The Osage Rose* are not family or community members; rather, the individuals conducting the investigations have been specifically solicited and paid to look into the mystery. Despite the opening murder, the initial mystery brought to J.D. and Hoolie doesn't explicitly relate to the Osage Oil Murders, but to the case of a missing non-Native woman. J.D. Daugherty falls under the category of professional detective, since he runs his own firm and because he previously worked in law enforcement in Chicago. Hoolie Smith, one of J.D.'s operatives, on the other hand, falls under the category of amateur detective, since Hoolie does not have "traditional" detective training. However, the skills that Hoolie brings to the job are essential; as a Cherokee, a veteran, a mechanic, and someone who grew up around firearms, Hoolie possesses specific knowledge that helps him work as a detective. In addition, J.D. also hires Danny Ryan, a young boy, to work as an operative. Danny also falls under the category of amateur detective; while he does not have formal training in detecting, he has certain connections and the ability to get information from people.

In depicting a team of detectives, Holm highlights the ideological differences between their various methodologies, in regard to how these characters approach and rationalize their participation in the detective industry. For J.D., who is Roman Catholic and Irish, his work had put him "constantly on the move, never settling in one place for more than a couple of years, and he'd forgone wife and family" (2). As a result, J.D. sees working as a detective as the foremost important aspect of his life. In addition, J.D. also uses his Irish and Roman Catholic worldview

to guide his actions. Because Danny Ryan's family "reminded J.D. of his own parents and of his own rough and tumble upbringing in South Chicago, J.D. got John Ryan some work here and there, and occasionally, he slipped him some money. He would always tell John that the Irish had to stick together" (23). J.D.'s identity and viewpoint guide his actions as an investigator, as well as causes him to have allegiances to specific groups of people, in particular the Irish, because of his own Irish identity.

Hoolie, on the other hand, is guided by his Cherokee identity and worldview, and thus rationalizes his work as a detective in a much different way. In regard to Hoolie, Holm writes: "Hoolie's work as a detective required him to poke into other people's lives. That aspect of investigative work went contrary to Cherokee principles. It was confrontational and intrusive; it was thus exactly the opposite of the emphasis Cherokees placed on harmony and consensus within the clan and household, among the people" (17). According to Perdue & Green, Cherokees "envisioned the world as composed of opposites that balanced each other" and that "Cherokees arrived at decisions by consensus . . . they discussed issues until everyone could agree or those who disagreed withdrew from the discussion" (3). Instead of seeing detective work as a business or a career like J.D. does, Hoolie views it as a way to help individuals and communities, in a way that aligns with the Cherokee worldview. Holm writes, "His people had medicine that aided them in bringing harmony back to individuals and communities. He had pretty much decided that his intrusive work could be reconciled with his Cherokee beliefs since he used his job to restore harmonious relationships when discord had upset the right way of things" (17). Similar to Stace, Hoolie brings an Indigenous worldview, specifically Cherokee, to his work as a detective, which ultimately affects his motivations and methods behind sleuthing.

A specific example of Hoolie relying on his Cherokee worldview to guide his investigation happens when he makes a stop on his way to Osage country: “In his peripheral vision, Hoolie detected a slight movement on a rock a few feet to his left. He looked more closely. It was a snapping turtle, *saligugi*, finding a place to bask in the morning sun before he went hunting for his meal” (43). In this moment, Hoolie feels the message of the turtle, which is, “The Thunderers have heard you. I will tell the people of this place of your duty. Terrible times are here. It is war. As in the old times, I will be a shield. You have to be a warrior in the old way. You must remember the stories and listen to others” (43). In this message, the snapping turtle tells Hoolie two very important things that other characters will reiterate to him throughout the story: first, to be a warrior and, second, to remember and listen to the stories. These two pieces of advice are what ultimately help Hoolie solve the mystery.

Reading the presence of the snapping turtle as a symbol for how he needs to act within this investigation strongly influences how Hoolie proceeds throughout the novel. When Hoolie meets the Lookouts, an Osage family, they invite him to their home and introduce him to Lily, an Osage elder. Ben, who is Lily’s son, tells Hoolie, “My mother says you’re here to help us...that you were sent. She said an ol’ snappin’ turtle told her” (77). Interestingly, that morning, when Lily had gone to the creek to say her prayers and fetch some fresh water to drink, “A snapping turtle had foretold Hoolie’s coming” to her (78). Because the Lookouts are Osage, and Hoolie is Cherokee, Ben wants to make sure that his mother’s perspective aligns with Hoolie’s. Ben says, “I don’t know how your people take these kinds of signs, but Osages take ‘em serious. Now, my mother says that you’re a warrior and we take that serious, too. So, you can stay here all you want, and we’ll help you find Tommy and this girl you’re lookin’ for” (78). This particular interaction is significant because it conveys a skill as a detective that Hoolie possesses that J.D.

does not. Even though Hoolie himself is somewhat skeptical of this situation, he understands that his positionality as a Native person helps him gain access to this community, despite technically being an outsider.

Throughout the novel, Hoolie is constantly reminded to remember the stories and to let those narratives guide him. When Hoolie returns home to prepare for his final leg of the investigation, his grandfather tells him “Just remember the stories. . . . They’ll tell you what to do” (220). As Hoolie is attempting to figure out how he will ambush Pete Henderson and the Sheriff, he “wished that he had the old-time power to make himself appear in one place while he was really in another” (222). He is reminded of a story his mother told him about how the terrapin beat the rabbit in a foot race. In the Cherokee version of the story that is included in *The Osage Rose*, the rabbit, who is boastful about winning, challenges all animals to a race; the only animal willing to participate is the terrapin. Assuming that this will be an easy race to win, the rabbit agrees. However, during the race, each time the rabbit comes over a hill, he sees the terrapin in front of him; when he passes the terrapin, the rabbit discovers that at the next hill, the terrapin is still ahead of him. When the race is finished, the rabbit loses to the terrapin. The rabbit is incredulous, but the story reveals that the brothers and cousins of the terrapin helped him beat the arrogant rabbit. Hoolie turns to this story and realizes that the answers are indeed embedded within the narratives he has been told his whole life. In order to be a warrior, like the snapping turtle instructs him, Hoolie needs to figure out how to be in two places at once. But he can only succeed with the help of others, like John Tall Soldier, an Osage who assists Hoolie with the investigation. Holm makes it clear that this is why these stories exist, because they are there to instruct and teach; people have faced these situations before, which is why it is so important to turn to the stories to learn and use them as a guide. Hoolie uses sacred history, specifically the

story of the terrapin and the hare, to guide him in designing his ambush of the culprits, the Sheriff and Pete Henderson.

Noting some of the ways in which Stace and Hoolie investigate, it goes without saying that there are some striking similarities between the two. First of all, both of them are Native Americans, but they are also both outsiders in terms of the tribe of the people that they are working with: Stace is Lakota and Hoolie is Cherokee. Even though Stace and Hoolie are technically outsiders, their positionality as Native American men grant them the ability to connect with and understand some of the issues the Osage people are experiencing. Stace and Hoolie embed themselves in the Osage culture, and form relationships with Osage individuals in order to get more information. Secondly, both Stace and Hoolie use their tribally-specific cultural worldviews to assist them in navigating the investigations. Both Stace and Hoolie pray, participate in ceremonies, and take the time to think about their own tribal communities, as well as their own tribal identities, and how they want to help their own people. While they share these aspects, Stace and Hoolie are different in terms of how they came to be detectives. Even though Stace's past is vague, the subtext suggests that he was formerly a police officer for his home community before becoming a federal agent. Hoolie, on the other hand, brings significant life experiences to his investigations, for example his time in the war, his work as a mechanic, and his knowledge of the land and of firearms.

Another cultural aspect included in both *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* that works as a form of reasoning is the use of dreams. The use of dreams relates to cultural worldview and the "high status conferred on dreams and dreaming is often considered a hallmark feature of Native American cultures" (Fritsch & Gymnich 204). Because said cultures "tend to view dreams as basically identical to conscious sensory perceptions and at the same time as potentially visionary

experiences,” dreams can play significant roles in guiding decisions (Fritsch & Gymnich 204). In both *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose*, dreams not only function in terms of the dreamer’s identity formation, but the dreams are also closely tied to specific mystery and detective genre questions such as: “Who committed the crime(s)? What is the motivation for actions related to the crime(s)? How does the detective figure gain access to information?” (Fritsch & Gymnich 204). Including dreams and using them as a form of reasoning allows Hogan and Holm to validate Native American cultures and worldviews (Fritsch & Gymnich 205).

The importance of dreams in *Mean Spirit* is conveyed shortly after the murder of Grace Blanket. Michael Horse attempts to understand what is happening, via the lens of dreams: “He wanted to put together the broken edges of things. A few of the Indians were beginning to awaken with dreams of danger” (39). Two specific examples Horse ponders are when Velma Billy dreamt that “a freezing white snow covered her body” and when Ruth Tate “remembered a dream of fiery stars that fell to earth and when they landed, everything burned” (39). Clearly, these dreams are foreboding, but Horse has a difficult time trying to figure out just what they signify. To these types of dreams, which many people bring to Horse, he responds by saying that the “earth was being drilled and dynamited open. Disturbances of earth, he told them, made for disturbances of life and sleep, but he wondered if he might be wrong” (39). Unfortunately, “Bad dreams were as common as gas fires at the drill sites, as ordinary as black Buicks” (39). With this first mention of dreaming and the suggested significance of dreams, Hogan makes it clear that in the Osage worldview dreams play an unmistakably important role. The text *Traditions of the Osage: Stories Collected and Translated by Francis La Flesche* confirms the importance of dreams in Osage culture by explaining that it is codified in Osage oral tradition; for example, one story, entitled “Dreamers,” states that “there were men [and women] whose dreams came true”

(La Flesche 123). These individuals were considered exceptional and were often medicine people who could use their powers for good, evil, or both.

Michael Horse exemplifies his exceptional status when he is able to see the future in his dream (La Flesche 34). Horse “had a terrible dream about an Osage man named John Thomas” (92). In the dream, “Thomas was shot beneath the famous auction tree in town, the tree where oil rights were going to be leased and bought and sold the next day” (92). Sure enough, Horse’s dream fulfills itself: John Thomas drunkenly drives himself into town, where he “left his car engine running while he chased furiously through the town yelling, ‘I know who killed Grace Blanket,’ and throwing silver dollars through the store windows, breaking the glass. He wept and screamed. He tore at his shirt like a madman” (97). Instead of helping or responding to John Thomas, the people of the town are scared and close their windows. And certainly, John Thomas is acting out of control, but when a shot is fired, “except for the idling of Thomas’s car, the town went silent” (97). Shortly thereafter, someone “caught sight of something that looked like a man’s figure lying curled up beside the road” (103). It was John Thomas, and he “had been shot through the neck” (103). Shortly after Horse’s dream about John Thomas comes true, Horse dreams of his own capture. Horse again exemplifies his exceptional status when he is arrested for the death of John Thomas (108).

Within *The Osage Rose*, dreams too play an important role and Hoolie relies upon them to help him solve the mystery. When Hoolie conducts a sweat to prep himself for the investigation, he directs several prayers in the cardinal directions, and asks “for the presence of the bat and the peregrine, his two personal helpers” (40). These particular spirits are significant because they “had seen when hardships distorted Hoolie’s thinking or threatened to do harm to him, his friends, or his family. They had talked to him in his dreams, and he was sure that they

had picked him up after he had been wounded on the battlefield in France” (40). The reader then learns about how Hoolie was injured in the war: a German shell had blown up the truck he had been driving and killed or wounded everyone in the party. Hoolie was severely wounded, and as he was praying for help, he passed out. Hoolie had his first dream about the bat and the peregrine after this event and “In his dream, the bat picked up one of his shoulders; the peregrine, the other” (40).

When Hoolie conducts a sweat to prepare for his travels in Osage country, he asks “that the spirits help him in his quest to find the lost daughter of the white man from Pennsylvania” (41). Sitting still, Hoolie looked around for anything that would tell him that his prayers had been heard. Upon seeing two glowing eyes in the rock pit, Hoolie “knew that the peregrine—the far-seeing bird of Cherokee warfare—would be there to help him see at great distances” (41). Then Hoolie hears a fluttering sound and the bat speaks to him, saying “I will help. My time is the night, and you’ll need to know the darkness to find the lost girl” (41). In terms of the bat, Hoolie considers it a welcome omen, since it’s a night animal, “piercing the darkness meant that a mystery would be made clear and that harmony would be restored” (41). The reader also learns that the “bat was the medicine animal of the ballplayers” because the bat “was nimble and quick” (41)<sup>5</sup>. The peregrine, on the other hand, unnerved Hoolie, because “In Cherokee tradition, the bird was associated with war” (41). In attempting to understand the presence of the peregrine, Hoolie asks: “Was the peregrine trying to warn him that violence and death and hardship and strife were a part of this case? Was the bird trying to steel him for terrible things to come?” (41-

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<sup>5</sup> Bats also play a significant role in *Mean Spirit*, although not within the context of dreams. However, Hogan makes it clear that in the Osage worldview, bats have an important role in relation to medicine; for example, Hogan writes, “Bat medicine had been on Belle’s mind of late” (137).

2). Embedding these specific details about Cherokee culture works to magnify the interconnectedness of a tribally-specific worldview and the process of detection.

Later in the novel, when Hoolie meets up with John Tall Soldier, who is Osage, John emphasizes the importance of dreams and encourages Hoolie to listen to his dreams. After Hoolie and John have been put in jail, John tells Hoolie that he prayed a lot and that his dreams have told him some important information. John tells Hoolie, “I been helped out by a boy and an old man who come into my dreams” (185). The boy and the old man pointed John to a specific place: “There was a small cornfield close by. I recognized the place. It was Billy Wallace’s and Tom Miller’s. I saw that, and I knew that they was all in it together” (185). Because Hoolie is Cherokee and understands the importance of dreams, he listens to John, while someone like J.D. might not give John’s message the same respect. John’s dream ultimately ends up being accurate, as Hoolie and John discover Rose Chichester, the missing girl, when they go to the residence of Billy Wallace and Tom Miller.

When Hoolie returns home to receive medicine from his grandfather, “Hoolie knew that his grandpa put great faith in dreams, and Hoolie knew that a dream would no doubt come to him that very night” (219). Hoolie hears sounds and “wakes up” all while still dreaming. Whatever is making the sound speaks to Hoolie and says, “Don’t be afraid. Look at me now” (219). When Hoolie looks, he “stared directly into two glowing, yellow eyes of a large, sleek panther” (219). Then the panther provides some very important information that helps Hoolie enact justice: the panther says, “You’re hunting two men. They will come to you where you found the woman. They’re hunting you, so you have to hunt. Hunt as I do, alone. Bringing another along would be dangerous” (219). This advice, in some ways, runs contrary to the lesson of the rabbit and terrapin; while that story promoted community collaboration, the panther advises Hoolie to work

alone. This dream causes Hoolie to wake with a start, and when Hoolie tells his grandfather about the panther, his grandfather “reaffirmed what the spirit told his grandson. Hoolie had to hunt the two men alone, as the big cat would. The grandfather also admonished Hoolie that the old stories held all the answers” (220). Because Hoolie takes the advice he has been given, about listening to the stories and about listening to his dreams, he is able to seek revenge on the murderers, by combining the lessons from the story about the rabbit and the terrapin with what the panther tells him in his dream. Hoolie achieves this by fashioning and positioning a dummy to trick the murderers into thinking he is in one location, while he is actually hidden and at a vantage point where he can shoot the culprits. Ultimately, listening to the stories and interpreting his own dreams are what allows Hoolie to restore justice.

After the development section, the final important aspect of the traditional mystery, crime, and detective fiction plot is the resolution. According to *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, the typical ending of a detective novel usually involves “the final confrontation in which, ideally, all the suspects are gathered together . . . the detective demonstrates that each suspect in turn is capable of having committed the murder, and then clears each, one by one” (Herbert 89). Neither *Mean Spirit* nor *The Osage Rose* conforms to this typical convention, since there is no final scene when all potential culprits are eliminated one by one. Rather, Stace and Hoolie—and even J.D.—enact their own forms of justice.

At the end of *Mean Spirit*, two trials are conducted, and John Hale, the non-Native oilman, is imprisoned for the numerous murders of Osage people. However, Hale’s prosecution does not ensure that the Osage are now safe. Stace realizes this because, “Hale, sent to prison, was lost to time. Yet his presence had changed the world. And Stace was not yet certain the crimes were over, or that all the culprits were locked behind bars” (360). Indeed, the final scene

proves that Stace's intuition is correct. Belle wakes up to the sound of a fight, where Floyd, her non-Native son in law, is having an argument with an unidentified individual (373). Suddenly a shot is fired and from his campsite, Stace hears it and rushes to the Graycloud house. The family discovers that Ruth, Moses Graycloud's twin sister, has been murdered by her own husband, John Tate, a non-Native man. After Moses shoots John, he tells his family, "We have to go. I shot him. I'll be arrested. They'll be looking for me" (375). As a final resort, the Grayclouds pack what they can onto a wagon and leave, and with their house on fire, the Grayclouds "looked back and saw it all rising up in the reddened sky" (375). As they left, "No one spoke. But they were alive. They carried generations along with them" and "The night was on fire with their pasts and they were alive" (375).

Even though John Hale and John Tate are recognized as two of the murderers in *Mean Spirit*, the ending of the novel does not provide a clean, closed-case resolution that is the hallmark of so many mystery, crime, and detective texts. Instead, Hogan makes a political assertion about the role of law enforcement and justice, particularly in regard to Osage people in the 1920s. Even though Hale and his cronies murdered upwards of twenty Osages, it is Moses, who killed one individual—as a form of self-defense—that must leave the area, for fear of being arrested and jailed. Instead of ending with the imprisonment of all the murderers, and thus the restoration of justice, *Mean Spirit* ends by highlighting the instability the Osage people felt in regard to seeking justice. In a way, Hogan is highlighting the continued lack of justice for these grisly murders, and makes it clear that even though this is the end of the novel, this is likely not the end of the plight for the oil-rich Osage, even the Grayclouds, who leave the area.

The ending of *The Osage Rose* wraps up more cleanly with Hoolie using Cherokee stories to help him bring an end to the unidentified men depicted in the prologue, who are the

Sheriff and his nephew Pete Henderson. The murdered individual is Tommy Ruffle. After Hoolie kills the Sheriff and Pete Henderson, he uses his cultural worldview to help him restore harmony for himself and for the Osage community. Hoolie asks Lily Lookout and John Tall Soldier to talk with him in private; he says to them, “the warriors used to go out and take captives and scalps to show that they fought the enemies. The captives and the scalps were given away to the women to stop them from grievin’ and to get everything back to normal...Now, we’ve put away takin’ scalps” (241). Instead of bringing back scalps, Hoolie brings two red bundles, one of which holds a sheriff’s badge and the other a gold watch with a chain and fob (241). Hoolie says, “I killed Pete and the sheriff. I don’t care what the white man says. It was justice” (241). Hoolie recognizes how his Cherokee worldview doesn’t match the non-Native worldview, but from a Cherokee perspective, justice has been restored.<sup>6</sup>

With both *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* ending with retaliatory killings, these acts *could* be interpreted as forms of vigilante justice. However, examining traditional cultural practices of the Osage and Cherokee conveys that such a characterization is not accurate, since retaliatory killings were common practices for both tribes. In terms of Osage cultural practices regarding death, an additional killing was common; this additional killing was not necessarily retaliatory, per se, but had more to do with the journey the murdered individual made to the spirit world. According to Rollings in *The Osage: An Ethnohistorical Study of Hegemony on the Prairie-Plains*,

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, in this same vein of justice, J.D. performs a similar act. While the story technically ends with Hoolie giving the bundles to Lily Lookout and John Tall Soldier, Holm appends an epilogue. In this part, which is set in 1956, Hoolie is depicted reading a newspaper, in which he discovers that J.D. has killed six men. Like Hoolie, it is suggested that J.D. did so as an act of revenge, because these men killed an African American woman, Minnie Whitwell, in front of J.D. during the Tulsa Race Riots. Presumably, J.D. kills them in order to enact justice.

Tribal tradition maintained that while an important tribal member was mourning for a family member he was visited by the spirit of the dead kin. The spirit claimed that spirit land was a lonely place and asked his kinsman to kill someone to accompany him. The mourner raised a raiding party and sought out a stranger to accompany his relative in the spirit world. After the killing, the mourner scalped the victim and fastened the scalp to a pole over the dead relative's grave. (36)

While Hoolie's decision to murder Pete Henderson and the Sheriff fall more in line with Cherokee practices of blood revenge, his choice can still work for the Osage worldview. Hoolie's choice to kill Pete and the Sheriff upholds the Osage tradition of the mourning dance, which was a ceremony "performed at the request of the parents or other relatives of the dead person and for the purpose of organizing a war party to go against some enemy of the tribe to secure a spirit to accompany the dead to the spirit land" (La Flesche 129). Since Pete Henderson and the Sheriff would be considered enemies of the Osage, Hoolie's decision to kill them upholds traditional Osage practices. Furthermore, Moses's murder of John Tate upholds Osage practices, but barely makes a dent in re-establishing the balance due to the numerous homicides of Osage individuals.

In the Cherokee belief system, retaliatory killings were normal practices, especially in cases of homicide. The Cherokees "believed in and followed an early code of justice often referred to as blood feud or blood revenge" (Chowritmootoo 32). The idea of blood revenge upheld the Cherokee's guiding principle, the concept of dualism, and death was used as a means of maintaining the balance. In the Cherokee worldview, failure to avenge the victim would have two detrimental effects: "first, the earth would be out of harmony, and it is when the world was out of harmony that many believed that diseases would come to visit; second: the soul of the victim, if left un-avenged, would be condemned to roam the earth unable to cross over into the

darkening land” (Chowritmootoo 33). Because of these beliefs, whether the death had been intentional or accidental did not matter (Chowritmootoo 33). According to Chowritmootoo, in terms of a homicide, the convening authority consisted of the clan members of the immediate family and the enforcing agent of justice was the oldest male of the family, normally the brother of the murdered, or the matrilineal uncle, and the appropriate punishment for this crime was the death of the murderer, and if that was not possible, the death of a clan member (Chowritmootoo 34). The individual who was going to enact justice would “sneak into the camp of the offending party and kill the person responsible; if they were unable to discover the offender, then another member of the clan could be killed instead” (Chowritmootoo 34). Not only is Hoolie’s decision to kill Pete Henderson and the Sheriff compatible with the Osage worldview, but also in the Cherokee worldview.

*Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* utilize some of the typical conventions of mystery, crime, and detective writing, most specifically, the opening, the detectives, the forms of reasoning, and the resolution. Hogan and Holm upend some of these prototypical elements by embedding culturally-specific details, which work to indigenize the texts: the victims are Native American, the prevailing detectives are Native American, there are tribally-specific cultural practices that aid in the detection process, and the restoration of harmony at the end of each novel occurs from Osage and Cherokee worldviews. While both novels contain the basic elements of a crime, a criminal, a victim, and a detective, Hogan and Holm edit these details to foreground Native American history, cultures, and perspectives. Both of these novels utilize “the constraints of the historical record in order to explore actual puzzles from the past,” but in doing so, Hogan and Holm not only highlight the Osage Oil Murders, but also the larger injustices that have been waged upon Native Americans for centuries (Herbert 209). In this way, Hogan and

Holm inform, educate, and raise the consciousness of all readers by indigenizing a genre of fiction that is popular and accessible to many individuals.

## II. VIOLENCE AGAINST NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN: ELEMENTS OF MYSTERY, CRIME, AND DETECTIVE FICTION IN *ELSIE'S BUSINESS* AND *THE ROUND HOUSE*

In *Murder on the Reservation* Ray B. Browne writes that there are typically two major purposes of crime fiction: 1) to picture society in upheaval before the status quo is reestablished and 2) to show how society is altered through violence and crime (3). In both cases, crime fiction inhabits a space that provides stimulus to the reader's imagination about the possibility of change through such depictions of upheaval and violence. Two examples of novels that illustrate the ramifications of violence and crime are *Elsie's Business* (2006) by Frances Washburn and *The Round House* (2012) by Louise Erdrich. Critics and book reviewers alike acknowledge that *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House* foreground the complex issues that surround sexual violence and Native American women, but there is little conversation about *how* Washburn and Erdrich succeed in doing so. This chapter adds to the existing conversation about sexual and physical violence in *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House* by examining how specific mystery, crime, and detective fiction elements are embedded in the texts. Framing *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House* as mystery, crime, and detective novels, conveys how Washburn and Erdrich present powerful messages about the issues of justice and sexual violence against Native American women in Indian Country.

Since both *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House* focus on sexual violence against Native American women, and since this is a contemporary issue of concern, some contextual information is important. In her text *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, Sarah Deer states that "It is irrefutable that, based on the available data, violent crime is experienced by Native women at per capita higher rates than almost all other groups in the United States" (1). Deer acknowledges that collecting data about Native

people is difficult, not only due to a lack of interested researchers, but also because of the fact that Native people make up such a small percentage of the American population (2). However, in 1999, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a subdivision of the U.S. Department of Justice, issued a report titled *American Indians and Crime*, which noted “a highly disproportionate level of victimization in the lives of Native people” (Deer 2). Since the release of this report, multiple other assessments corroborate the findings, and most specifically reveal that “Native women in particular suffer the highest rate of per capita rape in the United States” (Deer 3). While the conclusion of each study varies in its specificity of the rate of per capita rape of Native women, it is clear that all studies confirm that Native women suffer a higher chance of rape than other groups of women in the U.S. For example, the National Crime Victimization Survey found “an average rate of 7.2 per 1,000 persons, compared to 1.9 per 1,000 persons for all races” (Deer 4). In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a report “which found that 49 percent of Native women report a history of sexual violence” (Deer 4). While the numbers may vary, all reports confirm the high numbers of per capita rape of Native women, and Deer even states that such studies “represent at best a very low estimate. Actual rates of sexual assault against Native American women are actually much higher” (5).

Part of the issue surrounding the high rate of per capita rape of Native women relates to the complex maze of jurisdiction that exists within Indian Country. In the United States, the majority of rapes are “intra-racial, meaning that victims are usually attacked by persons of their own race” (Deer 6). However, Native women are an exception to this rule, since they “report that the majority of assailants are non-Native” (Deer 6). Part of the issue regarding seeking justice for these crimes relates to tribal jurisdiction, since in 1978, the Supreme Court issued a decision in *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, which found that tribal governments do

not have the authority to prosecute and punish non-Indians for crimes committed in Indian Country (Deer 6-7). While Native men are also perpetrators of sexual violence, and for such crimes they should not be absolved of responsibility, the fact is that Native men represent a minority of culprits in the rape of Native women, and that the decision in *Oliphant* makes it impossible for tribal governments to seek justice for their own community members sexually attacked by non-Native individuals. Deer argues that “tribal nations should have full authority to respond to crimes committed by *all* persons” and the stories told by Washburn and Erdrich confirm Deer’s stance (8, emphasis mine). In telling two different stories that both foreground sexual violence against Native women, *Elsie’s Business* and *The Round House* employ conventional mystery, crime, and detective genre elements to make a call to action about the high rate of sexual violence against Native women and the lack of subsequent justice.

Published by the University of Nebraska Press, *Elsie’s Business* by Frances Washburn (Lakota/Anishinaabe) is set in Mobridge and Jackson, South Dakota during the late 1960s. The novel tells the story of the titular character, Elsie Roberts, who is of mixed race: African American and American Indian, specifically Lakota. After being beaten, raped, and left for dead by three non-Native high school boys, Elsie attempts to rebuild her life, and earns a living by cleaning houses, tanning deerskins, and beading moccasins and bags—work that her mother did. Although Elsie feels at peace doing this labor, the sentiment is fleeting since someone in Elsie’s life is determined to permanently silence her. Nearly a year after Elsie’s mysterious murder, an African-American man from Mississippi named George Washington comes to Mobridge to attempt to uncover the details surrounding Elsie’s death. George enters the Lakota world of *Elsie’s Business* as an outsider and is warmly welcomed by Oscar DuCharme, a Lakota elder, who illuminates to George aspects of the Lakota worldview and culture, which ultimately

provide George with clues about Elsie and her death. At the end of the novel, the identity of George Washington is finally confirmed: he is Elsie's father, which resolves one of the mysteries presented in the text, and explains why George wants to understand Elsie's death. In terms of Elsie's murder, even though there are several possible suspects, the killer remains unknown at the end of the novel. Instead of uncovering who killed Elsie, George Washington exhumes Elsie's body and returns to Mississippi.

Reviewers of *Elsie's Business* have observed some of the ways in which the novel simultaneously embraces and subverts conventions of the mystery, crime, and detective genre. For example, in his review, Peter Grandbois states: "In flirting with the mystery genre, Washburn subverts it, refusing to solve either of the mysteries" (155). Rather than solving the mysteries, as Grandbois notes, "the reader soon realizes that there are no answers to questions such as murder and identity" and that "What matters is that the story is passed on. It is enough that the narrator hears Elsie's business, that we hear her story" (Grandbois 155). Because crimes of sexual and physical violence against Native American women often go unreported, uninvestigated, and unprosecuted, *Elsie's Business* simultaneously mimics reality and subverts the genre's usually neatly-tied endings. In Louise Cummings Maynor's review, published by the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, she notes how the Lakota stories embedded in *Elsie's Business* "underscore the theme of justice in the novel. In these narratives, a force of nature avenges the wrongs that would otherwise go unpunished" (128). Like many texts in the mystery or detective genre, justice plays a role in *Elsie's Business*, but as Maynor notes, Washburn employs a form of justice not often present in many traditional mystery or detective novels, due to the role of Lakota cultural elements. The observations made by both Grandbois and Maynor—that the novel refuses to solve the mysteries presented and that cultural elements

are intertwined with justice—serve as good points of departure for this essay; analysis of mystery, crime, and detective fiction elements in *Elsie's Business* is important in illuminating the contemporary injustices of violence against Native American women presented in the story.

The other text this chapter examines is *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich (Anishinaabe), which was published by Harper Perennial and won the 2012 National Book Award. Set on a fictional North Dakota reservation in the late 1980s, the novel follows the aftermath of the physical attack, rape, and attempted murder of Geraldine Coutts. The narrative is relayed to the reader through the eyes of Joe Coutts, Geraldine's son, who is thirteen-years-old at the time of the crime; however, Joe tells the story from the present, long after the fact, as an adult and lawyer. Joe's father, Bazil, is a tribal judge but his attempts to pursue justice for his wife prove fruitless, due to the complicated maze of legal jurisdictions surrounding crime in Indian Country. As soon as Joe develops an understanding of how justice has not prevailed in regard to Native American issues in the past, he enlists the help of his trusted friends, relies upon his own intuition and desire to solve the crime, and begins sleuthing. After reading court cases with his father, finding clues, and testing numerous theories, Joe discovers the identity of his mother's attacker, and knows that if he wants to see justice served, that he must enact it himself. With his friend Cappy, Joe performs an act of vengeance at the end of the novel and kills his mother's attacker.

Critics and reviewers of *The Round House* have noted Erdrich's employment of mystery, crime, and detective fiction elements, but fail to elaborate on how Erdrich conforms to or subverts these conventions. For example, in her article, "Erdrich's Crusade: Sexual Violence in *The Round House*," Julie Tharp writes, "Erdrich consciously uses the suspense novel format to empower her crusade," but there is a lack of discussion of the specific ways in which Erdrich

creates suspense (29). Another observation regarding genre comes from a review published by *The New York Times*, in which Maria Russo notes that “Joe is the only narrator, and the urgency of his account gives the action the momentum and tight focus of a crime novel, which, in a sense, it is” (Russo). Richard Mace picks up Russo’s thread of crime fiction in his review published by *The Rocky Mountain Review*, when he notes that, “Erdrich tackles the problematic situation of jurisdiction in her novel and the history of difficulties that Native Americans faced in their attempts to get justice through the U.S. legal system” (161). And, finally, in a book review in *The Guardian*, Laura Miller notes how *The Round House* mimics real life in the sense that “One in three Native women will report being raped in her lifetime, and 86% of the perpetrators are non-Native men, most of whom have good cause to expect they’ll get away with it” (Miller). The statements made by Tharp, Russo, Mace, and Miller—that the novel is one of suspense and crime, and that it foregrounds issues of justice in mimicking reality—provide impetus to further investigate *how* Erdrich simultaneously conforms to and subverts traditional elements of mystery, crime, and detective fiction.

Since *Elsie’s Business* and *The Round House* overlap in terms of form—through the use of mystery, crime, and detective fiction elements—as well as in terms of content—physical and sexual violence committed against Native American women—the texts are in conversation with each other on multiple levels. Specifically, both Washburn and Erdrich are issuing a call to action for readers to see the prevalence of violence against Native American women and the subsequently problematic issues surrounding legal jurisdiction and justice in Indian country. Analysis of classic mystery elements such as the openings, the detectives, the forms of reasoning used, and the resolution, convey how Washburn and Erdrich blend detective and mystery features to inform and educate readers about violence against Native American women.

Like the majority of texts that comprise the mystery, crime, and detective fiction genre, the openings of both *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House* present a puzzle; however, while Erdrich's puzzle is typical, Washburn's is more unconventional. The opening line of *Elsie's Business* reads, "If you want to know more about Elsie's story than just the official reports you have to ask one of the grandfathers, because they know all the old stories as well as the new ones, the latest gossip, and sometimes it's all the same stories happening over and over" (1). While Washburn conforms to the genre in the sense of presenting a puzzle, the initial puzzle presented does not immediately center "around a significant act like murder," which would be a traditional opening (Herbert 331). Instead, the initial puzzle the reader encounters relates to figuring out to whom "you" refers. As Maynor writes, "At first, the narrator's second-person 'you' reference is puzzling, but the reader is soon convinced that 'you' is not a communicative or directive reference to the reader to perform some action in response; this reference is an authentic second-person voice to be sustained throughout the story" (Maynor 127). While the use of the second-person narration becomes normalized as the story continues, Washburn only drops small hints throughout the novel regarding the identity of "you." Through the use of second-person narration "Washburn is able to withhold the full identity of the narrator until the end of the novel, thus increasing the mystery of why he sacrifices so much in order to know Elsie" (Maynor 127). Because of this narration style, the first puzzle Washburn presents varies greatly from the typical opening of a mystery or detective novel.

In addition to presenting the mysterious "you," it is also clear from the opening line of *Elsie's Business* that a crime has been committed and that it remains unsolved. The reader learns that "It's been a little over eleven months now since Elsie died," but that the story has been handed around so much that people have "worn the bumps off it, smoothed it with loving words,

polished it with lies, half truths, and omissions” (1). In other words, many people don’t know what actually happened to Elsie, but one thing is certain: the grandfathers of the community are the ones to ask about it. And with that information, “you” meet Oscar DuCharme, a Lakota elder, who tells “you” Lakota stories that on the surface don’t appear to “have anything to do with Elsie” (5). In these ways, Washburn presents at least three mysteries at the beginning of the novel: 1) the identity of “you” is unclear; 2) the details surrounding Elsie’s death are mysterious; and 3) the stories Oscar tells “you” are enigmatic and seem unrelated to Elsie’s murder.

*The Round House*, on the other hand, contains a much more typical opening for mystery and detective novels. The book begins with Joe and his father, Bazil, pulling tree roots out of the foundation of their house. Enough time passes that they become worried about Geraldine, Joe’s mother, because she has not returned home after running what was supposed to be a quick errand. This is a mystery in and of itself, since Joe, who serves as the narrator states that, “Mom would have returned by now to start dinner. We both knew that. Women don’t realize how much store men set on the regularity of their habits” (3). And so, Joe and Bazil borrow a car from Clemence, Geraldine’s sister, and aim to “find her,” as Bazil says, which is a comfort for Joe: “I was glad that he was so definite—find her, not just look for her, not search. We would go out and find her” (3). Bazil and Joe not only search for Geraldine, but they do find her, passing her as they drive towards the grocery store as she is returning home. There is relief when Joe states that “She whizzed by us in the other lane, riveted, driving over the speed limit, anxious to get back home to us” (5). Bazil and Joe think this mystery is solved—that Geraldine had gone to the grocery store and had forgotten that it is closed on Sundays—and “So it was our turn, then, to worry her” (6). After taking their time returning the car to Clemence’s house, they come home, and instead of finding Geraldine posing questions about their whereabouts, Joe and Bazil find

her still in the car, hands clenching the steering wheel, “vomit down the front of her dress and, soaking her skirt and soaking the gray cloth of the car seat, her dark blood,” along with the accompaniment of the scent of gasoline (7). This depiction makes it clear that something incredibly violent has happened to Geraldine. And, thus, Erdrich opens the *The Round House* in a way that follows the conventions of mystery, crime, and detective fiction; the rest of the novel hinges on solving *who* as well as *why* someone would do this to Geraldine.

Even though the opening of *Elsie’s Business* presents multiple puzzles, one of those puzzles is very similar to the puzzle portrayed in the opening of *The Round House*: violence has been committed against a Native American woman by an unknown individual. Since the openings of each text depict a similar crime, both novels also overlap in terms of the detective. In *Elsie’s Business*, the primary detective is George Washington who, as the reader learns by the end of the book, is Elsie’s father; in *The Round House*, on the other hand, the detective is Joe Coutts, who is Geraldine’s son. Because the detectives in both books are closely related to the victim, and are part of parent-child relationships with the victim, they are not only amateur sleuths—since they have no formal training—but they are also accidental sleuths, which means that they are characters who are not detectives by profession, but who are the characters that assume the role of detective, usually by happenstance (Herbert 5). Accidental sleuths often emerge because “of his or her proximity to the scene of a crime,” but in these stories though, George and Joe more specifically exemplify the persona of being “related to or personally involved in the lives of other characters directly affected by crime” (Herbert 5). Since both George Washington and Joe are motivated by their familial relationships to act as detectives, this convention conforms to the idea that readers may find accidental detectives more appealing, since it is “easy to identify with a protagonist who is an ordinary citizen caught up in a web of

intrigue” (Herbert 6). Furthermore, casting the accidental sleuth allows less fixed “expectations regarding the character’s expertise” and sometimes presents a “greater sense of jeopardy threatening the protagonist,” due to the sleuth’s involvement and close relationship with the victim (Herbert 6). In using detectives who are related to the victims, Washburn and Erdrich mimic reality; since law enforcement often fails victims and their families, the investigative work is often left to those family members willing and able to do it.

Accidental sleuths who are related to the victim often operate “with a mission” to solve the mystery “as is the case when a mother, for instance, feels her determination will service to avenge or prevent a crime against her child where police efforts appear to be failing” (Herbert 5). However, in the case of these two texts, the detectives are not mothers, but rather a father in *Elsie’s Business* and a son in *The Round House*. In this way, both Washburn and Erdrich use male detectives to convey how violence against women not only affects the female victim, but also family members, including male family members. As Sarah Deer writes in regard to *The Round House*, this choice of detective “underscores the ripple effect. In the novel, both son and father suffer greatly in processing the experience that their mother and wife has suffered. Their lives are forever changed” (10). Washburn and Erdrich not only conform to the typical conventions of mystery, crime, and detective fiction, but they also present stories that mimic reality. Too often, law enforcement fails to provide adequate forms of justice to Native American individuals and communities; the prevalence of violence against Native American women serves as one specific example.

Working part and parcel with being an accidental sleuth comes limitations on abilities to investigate. One of the handicaps that both George and Joe possess is the fact that they are both outsiders, of sorts. George Washington is an outsider to Mobridge, as well as to the Lakota

culture, and has to not only learn about Elsie's life, but also about Lakota culture. Joe, on the other hand, is an outsider in the sense that he is a teenager who does not possess the same understanding about crime and the law as an adult would. Similar to how George has to learn about Lakota culture, Joe must learn about the law *and* Anishinaabe culture. Joe has to learn the definition of rape, uncover evidence, and become familiar with specific laws, acts, and court cases to begin to understand what happened to his mother. Furthermore, Joe listens to his grandfather Mooshum tell traditional Anishinaabe stories in order to mine for clues to figure out what he must do. In this sense, George and Joe are very similar; they are learning information as the reader learns information, which slowly unveils the stories surrounding the crimes.

Like professional sleuths, accidental sleuths still must gather evidence and exercise forms of detection to attempt to solve the crime. Worthington explains that "Evidence is inextricably involved in criminal investigations real and fictional: the verbal, visual or physical proofs establish the facts of the case; evidence is essential in correctly allocating guilt" (33). One of the most typical forms of reasoning is the act of observation, and even though George does not observe anyone directly, he must observe the characters presented to him in the stories of Oscar as well as the stories of Nancy Marks, a non-Native community member who was friends with Elsie (Herbert 376). Unlike the majority of the detectives examined in this project, George is not Native American, but rather African American, and thus is an outsider to the community in which he is acting as a detective, and he is constantly being advised to listen to the stories. Throughout the novel, Oscar imparts several stories to George, with little or no explanation, and it is clear that George does not fully grasp the point of Oscar's storytelling. At one point, George finally asks Oscar to explain one of the stories and Irene, Oscar's daughter, tells George, "You got to *listen* to the stories . . . They'll give you the answers" (195, italics original). George

doesn't quite understand what she means and asks, "What answers?" and she says, "The answers to everything" (195). Because Washburn includes very specific instances of storytelling performed by Oscar, and because those stories hold clues regarding Elsie's murder—or more accurately, clues as to how George should conduct himself— it is important to consider how the morals of the stories that Oscar shares relate not only to the overarching narrative, but also to how these stories influence George's investigation, and serve as a form of reasoning.

The very first Lakota story that Oscar shares occurs in the first chapter of the book, which is entitled "Anukite." To paraphrase and summarize Oscar's story, Inktomi is looking for something to do; he wants to get involved in somebody else's business. Many people tell him "*To go away and mind his own business,*" but Inktomi refuses to give up so easily (5, italics original). When he sees the first man and first woman, Wazi and Wakanka, just sitting there, he inquires what is wrong, and finds out that their daughter has just married and that they are lonely. They are sad that they are only human because they "*want to be gods*" (6, italics original). Inktomi promises to make Wazi and Wakanka gods by making their daughter, Ite, a god. As Ite sleeps, Inktomi whispers in her ear that she should set her sights on the very powerful Anpetu Wi, the sun, and if she does this, Anpetu Wi will be interested in her. She follows Inktomi's advice and all seems to be going well until Hanhepi Wi, Anpetu Wi's wife, arrives. Upon Hanhepi Wi's arrival, when Anpetu Wi sees Ite looking at him, Anpetu Wi points his finger "*and half of Ite's face turns ugly. / He points again and Ite is banished to the earth*" (7, italics original). Forever after this, Ite is known as Anukite: The Double Faced Woman. In referencing not only the title of the first chapter, but also the first Lakota term in the novel, this concludes Oscar's story.

The story could be interpreted any number of ways, but one moral of the story has to do with minding one's own business. Through this story, Oscar prescribes some rules about looking into other people's business, and it suggests that George needs to be careful with his investigation and not meddle in other people's affairs; in other words, George should not be confrontational or intrusive. At this point in the novel, though, George does not know how to contextualize or understand this story. Comprehension takes time and reflection. George does not receive an explicit explanation of the story's meaning, and neither does the reader. In her dissertation, Washburn discusses this particular narrative and states that within the context of Lakota storytelling that *Ite* "is one of the most important of the humans in that her sexually inappropriate behavior results in the embarrassment of some gods and her own downfall—a situation that culminates in dozens, if not hundreds, of stories in Lakota oral tradition that are meant to warn against such behavior" (*Beauty of Sound and Meaning* 190-91).

The next oral story takes place in chapter three, when Oscar shares the story of *Sinte Sapela Win*, also known as the Deer Woman story. In this story, a man is out hunting for food to feed his family when he suddenly sees a beautiful woman. Although this man is already married to a good woman, he thinks that this woman in the forest is particularly beautiful. He sits down beside her and "*he has her in that way, and he goes to sleep*" (17, italics original). When he wakes up, the beautiful woman is gone, and in her place is a black-tailed deer. The man returns home, thinking of the beautiful woman, and each following day, he leaves his home thinking of her and searching for her; in fact, he is so distracted by the thought of the beautiful woman that he forgets to hunt. As a result, his family begins to starve. One day he leaves home with the intent to hunt, but he never returns; "*Others go looking for him, and a long way from camp /*

*They find him, dead. / He has been trampled to death by a deer*" (17, italics original). This line ends the story.

Again, at the outset, the Deer Woman story is neither contextualized nor explained for George, or for the reader unfamiliar with Lakota oral tradition. All Oscar says before starting the story is, "Remember Anukite, the Double-Face woman, who tried to steal Hanhepi Wi's husband? Well, the Deer Woman is kind of like Anukite" (16). Without providing much information, Oscar makes it clear to you that there is a connection between Double-Face woman and Deer Woman, but he goes no further. Unlike Anukite, the Deer Woman story, along with deer-sightings, play a big role in the novel. In a class discussion, Washburn explained that the Deer Woman story is didactic, like many oral traditions, in that it is a story used to teach a lesson ("Discussion of *Elsie's Business*"). The moral for young women listening to the story relates to the idea that they should not venture away from home alone, to a place where they could encounter danger ("Discussion of *Elsie's Business*"). For the young man listening to the tale, the story teaches him to not stray from what he already has, and to especially not stray towards women who are alone and away from their homes ("Discussion of *Elsie's Business*"). It is dangerous for both women and men. Part of the Deer Woman story also has to do with what happens when a woman sees the Deer Woman compared to what happens when a man sees the Deer Woman. As is explained in *Elsie's Business*, "Men who see the deer woman go crazy, but women who see her are rewarded with the ability to make beautiful things—maybe beadwork or quillwork" (59). Similar to the story of Anukite though, George does not know how to contextualize or interpret the story of Sinte Sapela Win; comprehension takes time and reflection.

The story of Anukite and Sinte Sapela Win, or Deer Woman, are related to one another, particularly in terms of their depictions of women. In *Beauty of Sound and Meaning: An Analysis of Lakota Oral Tradition*, Washburn makes a clear connection between *Ite* and Deer Woman when she explains that “*Ite* is the paradigm for the figure of the Deer Woman, a beautiful but devious woman capable of assuming the guise of a deer to lure innocent men into sexually inappropriate behavior, which usually terminates in insanity or death” (*Beauty of Sound and Meaning* 190-91, italics original). In a contemporary telling of the Deer Woman story, Marshall recalls how his grandmother told him the story, and recounts some of the specific lessons the story is meant to teach; Marshall’s grandmother told him,

So when you are a young man, Grandson, and you are hunting alone far from home and you come across the most beautiful woman you have ever seen, you must turn away. If you go with her, she will please you and she will give you pleasure; but she will also take your spirit from you and you will never have it back. It may be the most difficult thing you will ever do, but you must turn away from her. (Marshall 41)

While Washburn is not as explicit in her explanation of Sinte Sapela Win in *Elsie’s Business* as Marshall’s grandmother was, Washburn’s choice is deliberate, since it mimics the protocol of oral tradition; Washburn notes that “Native American storytellers do not usually explain the meaning of the story, particularly when their audience members are also members of their own particular tribe” (“The Risk of Misunderstanding” 193). Even though George Washington, as well as many potential readers, are not Lakota, Washburn embeds the stories of Anukite and Deer Woman in *Elsie’s Business* with little explanation to reinforce the idea that “As the reader you what *you* get, and what you get depends on everything else you have ever read” (“The Risk of Misunderstanding” 191, italics original). George Washington and the reader must do some

detective work—which may involve ruminating on the stories and doing additional research—to attempt to piece together how these stories relate to Elsie’s mysterious murder.

Erdrich performs a similar action in *The Round House* by embedding traditional Ojibwe stories and refusing to explicate them. Mooshum, Joe’s grandfather, plays a role in imparting traditional stories which present implications for crime, violence, and justice and how these issues should be dealt with from an Anishinaabe perspective. Mooshum tells a story about Akiikwe, known as Akii, a person who at first was just an ordinary woman, married to her husband, Mirage, and the mother to several children. Mooshum explains that once people were pushed onto reservations, food began to run out and at this point in their marriage, Mirage was getting tired of Akii, so he convinced himself that a wiindigoo—an evil being—had cast its spirit inside of her. Such an act would cause the person to “become an animal, and see fellow humans as prey meat” (180). But there were certain protocols in taking care of the wiindigoo: “The thing to do was you had to kill that person right away. But not before you had agreement in the matter. You couldn’t do it alone. There was a certain way the killing of a wiindigoo must be done” (180). In order to get rid of the wiindigoo, Mirage gathered some men together and convinced them that Akii “was becoming very powerful and would soon go out of control” (180). Since “The only person who could kill a wiindigoo was someone in the blood family” Mirage gives his son, Nanapush, a knife and tells him to kill his mother (180).

Before requiring Nanapush to kill Akii, the men stuff Akii down an ice hole; they leave while Nanapush waits, hoping his mother is still alive. She manages to break free and Nanapush helps her, and afterward she teaches him a buffalo-hunting song (182). She tells him to leave her behind, and he follows her orders, singing the buffalo song as he makes his journey. He laments the fact that all of the buffalo are gone, but his song causes him to encounter one, and he kills it.

The meat from the buffalo provides him sustenance and the buffalo's body provides Nanapush protection from a strong winter storm. After the storm, Nanapush continues on his journey and reconnects with his mother, who also survived the storm. Mooshum explains that "This buffalo knew what had happened to Nanapush's mother," that Akii had been wrongly accused and needlessly attacked (187). Toward the end of the story, Mooshum shares that "windigo justice must be pursued with great care" (187).

Mooshum also states that the buffalo woman had explained to Nanapush that "he had survived by doing the opposite of all the others. Where they abandoned, he saved. Where they were cruel, he was kind. Where they betrayed, he was faithful. Nanapush then decided that in all things he would be unpredictable" (214). The buffalo woman continues to advise Nanapush, instilling in him the importance of the round house, as well as the significance of traditional Ojibwe practices. She says, "Your clans gave you laws. You had many rules by which you operated. Rules that respected us and forced you to work together" (214). The buffalo explains that "The round house will be my body, the poles my ribs, the fire my heart. It will be the body of your mother and it must be respected the same way" (214-15). Mooshum states that this is how the round house came to be, and that he was a young man when the people built it. This thought ends Mooshum's storytelling, and similar to Oscar, Mooshum does not explain the story to Joe; rather, Joe must interpret it on his own.

The inclusion of traditional and tribally-specific storytelling in *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House* presents one way in which the texts simultaneously conform to and subvert conventions seen in non-Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective fiction that features Native American detectives and settings. In the text *Shaman or Sherlock*, authors Macdonald and Macdonald write, "A measure of the competence and seriousness of the works of detective

fiction discussed . . . is the degree to which they at least acknowledge the dramatically different worldviews . . . Stories that ignore this difference or that reduce it to minor questions of etiquette or ‘lifestyle’ are usually simply exploiting the popularity of the genre” (38). Macdonald and Macdonald acknowledge the fact that different epistemologies shape Western and Indigenous worldviews, which is essential to analyzing Native American literature. Washburn and Erdrich integrate an Indigenous aesthetic because they embed traditional oral stories and purposely do not explain them for the reader, just as these stories are not explained in real life. Washburn takes it a step further through the use of the second person narration as a way to draw the reader into the story, to mimic the oral tradition, and to make the reader think from the perspective of George Washington. As a result, Washburn and Erdrich not only make it clear that Indigenous epistemologies differ from Western belief systems, but the way in which Washburn and Erdrich do so is representative of Indigenous forms of pedagogy. Just like George and Joe must figure out how these stories relate to the crimes committed, so, too, must the reader.

In addition to listening to Mooshum’s stories, Joe also exercises fairly typical forms of reasoning, which is one specific way in which *The Round House* conforms to the typical conventions of mystery, crime, and detective fiction. For example, since the attack and rape of Geraldine has *just* occurred, the time is ripe for finding clues and locating physical evidence. Joe encounters a significant amount of evidence in seeing the physical effects the attack has had on his mother. The injuries Geraldine sustains provide visual and physical evidence of the attack. In addition to the vomit, blood, and gasoline, Joe notes that his “mother’s face [is] puffed with welts and distorted to an ugly shape” (10). Geraldine’s injuries provide Joe and the reader with the first bit of evidence, and ultimately fuel Joe’s investigation: upon learning that his mother

was attacked, Joe thinks, “I wanted to know that whoever had attacked my mother would be found, punished, and killed” (12).

In order to uncover who attacked his mother, Joe is also faced with legal information he must translate. For example, after accompanying his mother and father to the hospital, Joe sits in the waiting room and hears the term “rape,” which is a major concept to understand in attempting to solve the mystery of who attacked Geraldine. Like a good detective, Joe wants to understand what “rape” means, and he turns to his aunt Clemence who explains, “Rape is forced sex. A man can force a woman to have sex. That’s what happened” (14). Armed with this straightforward definition, Joe can move ahead with his investigation. Furthermore, in establishing the definition of rape early in the novel, Erdrich makes it clear to readers that this understanding is foundational for the rest of the book. In doing so, Erdrich not only provides commentary on the discussions that have surrounded rape, but she also informs both Joe and the reader just what constitutes rape and this information is invaluable for solving the mystery at hand.

Equipped with an understanding of rape, Joe continues to gather evidence. For example, Joe’s friend, Zack, shares “from listening in on his stepfather’s burping police radio . . . where the crime against my mother had taken place. It was the round house” (58). With that knowledge, Joe heads to the round house on his own in order to look for evidence. Joe feels that he has found the exact location where the attack happened, and he imagines the dynamics of where his mother and her attacker would have been standing. Knowing that his mother had escaped and run to her car, Joe surmises that the attacker had gone “down the opposite side of the hill, to the north” (61). Joe reasons that the attacker had to have thrown the gas can in the lake and that if Joe “dived down and passed my hands along the muddy, weedy, silty, snail-rich bottom of the lake,

there it would be” (61). And Joe is right; he finds the gas can at the bottom of the lake. Upon finding it, Joe states that he “had now come to the understanding that my mother’s attacker had also tried to set her on fire” (62). With this understanding, Joe is even more determined to solve this mystery and to seek justice. Zack, Cappy, and Angus, then show up and Joe summarizes his understanding of what happened to his mother: “He did it here . . . He did it, then he wanted to burn her inside the place. But his matches got wet. He went over the hill and down toward the lake for dry matches. I told them exactly how my mother had escaped” (63). This summary conveys how Joe has been putting the clues together and how he has developed a narrative as to what happened, which is an example of deductive reasoning.

Armed with these clues—the definition of rape, the location of the round house, the gas can, and the matches—Joe continues to try to make sense of the story. As with many traditional detective stories, Joe comes across some red herrings, which can refer to “false or misleading clues and sometimes to suspects” (Herbert 378). For instance, at one point Joe and his friends think the local Catholic priest, Father Travis, may be connected to the crime, but pursuit of that theory proves fruitless. In addition, when Joe and his friends are looking for clues near the round house, they discover some unopened cans of Hamm’s beer. Joe assumes this means the attacker is a Hamm’s beer drinker; later in the story, though, Joe discovers that the Hamm’s beer belongs to someone else. These examples divert both Joe and the reader from the scent of the investigation, and conform to conventional elements of mystery, crime, and detective fiction.

As Joe uncovers more evidence, though, he also becomes more familiar with issues of jurisdiction and Federal Indian law. Worthington writes “The law is essential to the development of crime fiction: it is the law that constructs, or at least classifies, what is criminal” (53). While the form of law may vary from crime novel to crime novel, the law is “intrinsic to the genre”

(Worthington 53). In learning about the law, it becomes more and more clear to Joe that jurisdictional issues may prevent the tribe from prosecuting the perpetrator, particularly if the perpetrator is non-Native. The first example of this jurisdictional tangle occurs while Geraldine is still in the hospital. Three men representing different jurisdictions come to ask questions: “There was a state trooper, an officer local to the town of Hoopdance, and Vince Madwesin, from the tribal police” (12). Joe explains that his father had insisted that each entity “take a statement from my mother because it wasn’t clear where the crime had been committed—on state or tribal land—or who had committed it—an Indian or a non-Indian” (12). Since tribal governments only have jurisdiction over crimes that occur on their own land—but not crimes committed by non-Native people, no matter where those take place—the significance of where and who are of critical importance in attempting to enact justice in a case like Geraldine’s.

Many examples from Federal Indian law are embedded in the text as well. Felix Cohen’s seminal text *The Handbook of Federal Indian Law* plays a supporting role in the novel, as it is frequently quoted within the narrative, because Joe has a fascination with reading it and often sneaks peeks when his father isn’t around. When Soren Bjerke, a special agent for the FBI gets involved with Geraldine’s case, Joe informs the reader that the FBI’s involvement goes back to *Ex Parte Crow Dog* and the *Major Crimes Act of 1885*. Joe explains that this court case and act are how “the federal government first intervened in the decisions Indians made among themselves regarding restitution and punishment” (142). More specifically, the *Major Crimes Act of 1885* “grants jurisdiction of major crimes on tribal land to federal courts, but courts disagree over whether tribes have concurrent jurisdiction in Indian Country. Any given crime must go through a jurisdictional maze based on location, severity of crime, state status, and race of perpetrator” (Tharp 27). In the process of traversing such a maze, it is inevitable that many

cases are lost, dropped, or deferred (Tharp 27). For readers who are aware of this information *and* for readers for whom this information is new, Erdrich's presentation of legal fact highlights the injustices inherent in investigating and solving such crimes.

Perhaps the most poignant scene in which Federal Indian Law is discussed occurs when Bazil gets one of Clemence's old spoiled casseroles from the refrigerator and begins stacking its sloppy, smelly parts on top of one another with utensils—as a way to demonstrate to Joe just how complicated and messy Federal Indian Law is. In this scene, Bazil talks to Joe about a well-known Supreme Court case: *Oliphant v. Suquamish* (1978). Bazil “teased a particularly disgusting bit of sludge from the pile with the edge of his fork—this one is the one I'd abolish right this minute if I had the power of a movie shaman. *Oliphant v. Suquamish*. He shook the fork and the stink wafted at me. Took from us the right to prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes on our land. So even if . . . He could not go on” (229). In the case, the Supreme Court reasoned that tribes do not have inherent criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians and cites the Treaty of Point Elliot (1855), because according to the Supreme Court's decision, in signing the treaty, the tribe acknowledged its dependence on the U.S. and in doing so, it is assumed that the Suquamish were recognizing that the U.S. would arrest and try non-Indians. This means that the Supreme Court found that by incorporation into the territory of the U.S., tribes come under the territorial sovereignty of the United States. In short, the case states that “Indian tribal courts do not have inherent criminal jurisdiction to try and to punish non-Indians, and hence may not assume such jurisdiction unless specifically authorized to do so by Congress” (Tharp 27). This has presented major obstacles for seeking justice in Indian Country, particularly for Native women who have been victims of non-Native perpetrators.

Because Geraldine is still alive, Joe has the luxury of being able to speak to the victim. However, immediately following the attack, Geraldine refuses to speak and spends most of her time in bed. As Tharp writes, “Geraldine’s silence also fuels the suspense in the novel, forcing the other characters and reader to piece together scant clues” (Tharp 30). Eventually, though, about halfway through the book, Geraldine breaks her silence and finally shares what happened with Bazil and Joe. She says, “There is no evidence of what he did. None,” to which Bazil prompts her to fully explain what occurred (158). Geraldine explains that she had received a call that day from a young woman named Mayla Wolfskin, who had recently filed papers to enroll her daughter in the tribe. Since Geraldine was the tribal enrollment officer, she was the point of contact for this sort of business, and on that Sunday when Mayla called Geraldine, she had said “*My life depends on that file*” (160, italics original). Geraldine picked up the file and headed to the round house, the location Mayla told Geraldine to meet her.

When Geraldine arrived, she explains that the perpetrator,  
 tackled me as I walking up the hill. Took the keys. Then he pulled out a sack. He dragged it over my head so fast . . . I couldn’t see. He tied my hands behind me. Tried to get me to tell him where the file was and I said there’s no file. . . . He turned me around and marched me . . . held my shoulder. Step over this, go that way, he said. He took me somewhere. (159)

Geraldine then states that “He kept the sack on me. And he raped me. Somewhere” (159). After the rape, “He dragged me up to the round house” (160). In the round house, the perpetrator tied Geraldine up and removed the sack covering her head; Geraldine saw Mayla “thrown on the ground. Her hands were taped up behind her” as her child crawled around on the dirt floor. The assailant then began to scream, proclaiming, “I won’t get caught. . . I’ve been boning up on the

law” (161). He then struck Mayla and Geraldine several times and demanded of Mayla, “You want to tell me where the money is? The money he gave you?” (161). Mayla told him that it’s in the car, and referring to both Mayla and Geraldine, he said, “Maybe I should burn the evidence. You know, they’re just evidence,” and he began to pour gas on Mayla (162). While he was doing this, Geraldine grabbed his pants, which contained his matches, and urinated on them in order to make them wet. After he poured gasoline on Geraldine, he attempted to light a match, but it wouldn’t work and he headed to his car to get a lighter. Presumably, this was when Geraldine escaped. Geraldine’s firsthand account provides Joe with a lot of the information he needs to know in order to carry out justice.

While Washburn does not embed specific laws, acts, or court cases, a similar message is made abundantly clear in *Elsie’s Business*: seeking justice for Native American women is not easy. Over the course of the novel, Elsie is attacked not once, but twice. When Elsie is first attacked and raped by Billy and Bobby Mason, and their friend Paul Johnson, she is not expected to speak again. However, once in the hospital, Elsie works hard to tell Sheriff Peterson who did this to her, but he is in disbelief of what she says. After the boys attacked and raped her, and left her on the side of the road on a cold January night, they drive away, see a deer in the middle of the road, and subsequently crash into a tree—an accident that kills all three of them. This could be interpreted as Deer Woman stepping in and enacting justice. Since all three perpetrators immediately died, the Sheriff explains to the nurse, “I don’t know if it would serve any purpose to have it all come out now. You can’t try dead men, and it wouldn’t do Elsie a bit of good anyway” (36). Even though the Sheriff is correct, that it’s difficult to try the deceased, he is wrong about an investigation doing nothing for Elsie. In fact, an investigation would do her a lot of good, in terms of giving her and the community clarity on what happened to her. The nurse

then asks the Sheriff, “What about justice?” and he responds by saying, “For all practical purposes, justice has already been served by that damn deer that stepped in front of those boys’ car, if there ever was a deer in the first place” (36). In this way, even Sheriff Peterson can recognize the sort of justice Deer Woman enacted on Billy, Bobby, and Paul. Instead of moving ahead with the prosecution, the nurse and the Sheriff decide to talk to someone from another parish that would be willing to welcome Elsie into a new community. When the Sheriff leaves, “the nurse takes the bag of clothes out behind the hospital and stuffs it into the incinerator” (37). And with that, some of the only evidence related to the crimes against Elsie are destroyed, making it clear that no investigation will take place, not now and not in the future.

Following the initial attack and rape of Elsie, several men throughout the story also act in problematic ways, either toward Elsie or toward women in general; those particular characters are Mr. Kolcek, Donald Marks, Father Horst, John Caulfield, and Mr. Packwood. With this cast of characters, Washburn provides multiple potential suspects that could have killed Elsie—a common feature of the mystery, crime, and detective genre. For example, Mr. Kolcek, who owns Jackson Locker Plant, where Elsie goes to get deer hides for making moccasins, is known for beating his wife (70). Donald Marks, who is Nancy Marks’s husband, “sought solace for himself among the Indian women in and around Jackson. It wasn’t that he found them more attractive than the white women, or more willing. He found them more convenient” (41). Elsie knows Donald since Nancy considers Elsie her friend, and Donald even takes Elsie home from the Marks’s Christmas party, and there are implications that he may have tried to engage Elsie in sexual behavior. Even Father Horst imagines Elsie “standing naked with her small breasts half covered with the long hair while she brushed it, russet nipples peeking out from beneath the strands” (122). John Caulfield, the town drunk, and Elsie develop a friendship that turns

romantic, or seems like it does, since they have a date, and Elsie is spotted “outside the house completely naked. She leaned over and kissed the man on the cheek”; that man is John Caulfield (138). And, finally, the most egregious behavior comes from Mr. Packwood; after making “half-compliments that were just a little too intimate, about Elsie’s beautiful calves” among other body parts, Mr. Packwood attacked Elsie one day as she cleaned the bathtub (147). Since George and the reader know that Elsie has been murdered, these instances provide a list of potential suspects.

After George learns about these incidents, Oscar finally shares the known details surrounding Elsie’s death. Oscar explains that a few days into the new year, Sheriff Parker discovered Elsie’s body and that she was badly beaten—the violence of the attack evidenced by “a spray of frozen blood on the side of the dumpster” (165). Sheriff Parker observed “From the looks of the wound on her head, the weapon had been a long, narrow object” and he “turned up an iron bar about four feet long” which was used to pry open the lid of the dumpster (166). The rod was “crusty with frozen blood on one end” but the Sheriff assumed an absence of fingerprints, since “No one in his right mind would have been wondering around last night without heavy gloves on” (166). Even though George has been told what is known about Elsie’s death, the reason anyone would want to kill Elsie remains unclear, leaving the criminal’s identity and motive unresolved.

Once the details of the crimes are revealed, the next important trait to take into consideration is the resolution, and whether justice is restored, as well as *how* justice is served. In *Elsie’s Business*, the novel ends with Elsie’s body being exhumed and George Washington taking it back to Mississippi. The way the novel ends appears as if justice has not been restored, and in many ways it hasn’t. Elsie’s murderer remains unknown, and there are several potential suspects, but the specifics are not explored, and according to Washburn, that was intentional. In a

classroom discussion, Washburn stated that she deliberately provided no closure because she wanted to get the point across that “we all killed Elsie and that we are all guilty, because no one stepped in and did anything” (“Discussion of *Elsie’s Business*”). This lack of justice mimics reality because so often Native women are raped and killed and the criminals are not brought to justice.

And, yet, while it feels like justice has not been served, in some ways it has, particularly when considering the Lakota story of Sinte Sapela Win, or the Deer Woman. While Elsie’s murderer remains unknown, the people of Jackson do not remain unscathed for their failure to prevent harm coming to Elsie. Since the reader knows that Elsie’s mother saw the Deer Woman, it is implied that Elsie, too, has seen the Deer Woman, due to her talents in beading and moccasin-making. Similar to the deaths of Billy, Bobby, and Paul, two men die under mysterious circumstances after Elsie is killed. First, John Caulfield confesses to killing Elsie, but before he can be questioned by the police, he is found swinging “slowly to and fro, his body suspended by his belt from the overhead pipe” in his jail cell (176). John had evidently said that “he’d been pissed at Elsie for months, mad enough to kill her . . . He said that he got drunk last night, or started yesterday afternoon” (176). Whether John killed Elsie or simply thinks he might have done so when he was drunk remains unknown, but his death prevents any sort of questioning. In addition to the death of John, Donald Marks also perishes, likely the night of Elsie’s murder; found frozen to death in his car, it is assumed that Donald was headed away from Jackson when he got stuck in a snowdrift and died in the blizzard (178). The deaths of John and Donald are mysterious enough in and of themselves, and whether either of them had any involvement in Elsie’s death remains unknown at the end of the novel. Their deaths could also be a result of

justice enacted by Deer Woman. In this way, the ending of *Elsie's Business* resists closure and breaks from the typical conventions of mystery, crime, and detective fiction.

Justice in *The Round House* is also fulfilled through an act of vengeance, inspired by a confluence of Catholic and Ojibwe beliefs. While Bazil initially refuses to explicitly state the identity of Geraldine's attacker, he does inform Joe that the attacker has been arrested, but this means little since, as Bazil explains, "There will be an arraignment where the judge will decide whether he can be charged. But even now we may be pushing the envelope. The defense attorney is filing a motion for his release" (196). With the attacker's potential release on the horizon, Joe and Bazil commiserate about their desire to hang him, but Bazil adds that "there is traditional Anishinaabe justice. We would have sat down to decide his fate. Our present system though . . ." (196). When Linden Lark, Geraldine's rapist, is indeed released, and back in the area, Joe and Bazil encounter him at the grocery store, where Bazil proceeds to grab him by the throat, and a fight ensues, only ended when Bazil suffers a heart attack. After this episode, Joe proclaims that, "Every day since the grocer, I wished I had brained Lark. I imagined myself killing him over and over" (249). However, since Joe had not killed Lark, he decides to join Father Travis's Saturday morning catechism class, secretly hoping that Father Travis will teach him how to shoot, since it is widely known around the reservation that Father Travis has a penchant for shooting gophers. During this training, Joe inquires Father Travis about the concept of "Sins Crying Out to Heaven for Vengeance," in which Father Travis explains that "The sins that cried out for vengeance were murder, sodomy, defrauding a laborer, oppressing the poor" (251). Joe reasons that "I thought I knew what sodomy was and believed it included rape. So my thoughts were covered by the church doctrine" (251). Joe uses the doctrine of the Catholic Church to support his decision to seek vengeance for his mother and Joe even proclaims, "I realized that my deceits were of no

consequence as I was dedicated to a purpose which I'd named in my mind not vengeance but justice. Sins Crying Out to Heaven for Justice" (260).

With support from the Catholic belief system, combined with the issues posed by jurisdiction, and with traditional Anishinaabe justice in mind, Joe decides that he must carry out justice on his own. Furthermore, when "The tribal council had given Lark notice that he was barred from the reservation, but there was really no way that could be enforced," Joe moves to action (266). He meets with Linda—Linden's twin—and learns when Linden likes to play golf. Armed with this information, Joe informs Cappy and the two of them formulate a plan to take Linden's life, which involves Joe faking a break in at Cappy's house, and stealing a rifle that Cappy's dad owns. Cappy helps Joe practice shooting, since Joe's not a very good shot, and when they decide it's time to do the deed, Joe finds a place to hide at the golf course, a spot that gives him a direct shot to whoever is on the green. Joe watches from his spot for a few days, and when Linden eventually appears, Joe shoots and hits him somewhere on the front of the body—a hit, but not a kill shot. Cappy, unbeknownst to Joe, is there as well and when Cappy sees Joe's sloppy shooting, he steps in, takes the rifle from Joe, and hits Linden right in the head, instantly killing him. After doing this, Joe and Cappy are somewhat incredulous, but move fast to cover their tracks; they decide to hide the rifle at Linda's house, and then head to Whitey's gas station, since Joe is certain Whitey will give them alcohol, which they both proclaim to need after committing the murder.

The reactions of Whitey and Linda uphold the notion of traditional Anishinaabe justice, a system of consensus, since both of them are complicit in covering up the crime committed by Joe and Cappy. Upon Joe's arrival, Whitey says, "Someone dusted Lark . . . On the golf course. Made a mess of him, like a kid shooting at a hay bale. Then one clean head shot" (288). Joe

immediately runs to the back of the gas station and vomits, and when Joe comes back, Whitey says, “I been listening to the squawk-box. Whoever did it left no traces . . . There’s nothing to go on. Nobody seen it. Nobody seen nothing,” which suggests that Whitey knows Joe and Cappy killed Linden and this is his way of letting them know that they’re safe. Whitey then proceeds to give Joe and Cappy alcohol, which they drink at the edge of the woods; after drinking and dozing, Joe and Cappy return to Whitey and he asks Joe for his shirt, and then instructs the boys to “Touch the bottle again” (291). When the police begin to investigate Linden’s murder, Whitey provides law enforcement with an alibi for Joe and Cappy, using the shirts and fingerprint-covered bottle as evidence.

When Joe shows up at Linda’s house, she too is complicit in covering up the crime. Joe tells her he hid the rifle under her porch, and Linda says,

Don’t worry, Joe. Want to know where I’ve been on my sick leave? To Pierre, to my brother Cedric’s. He got his training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and sure knows how to disassemble that rifle. We threw a couple of pieces in the Missouri. I drove back in a zigzag that I can’t even remember. . . . Tell whoever did it to rest easy. (301)

Linda even saves a screw from the rifle, and tells Joe that he can tell his mom that “she can keep this in her jewelry box. Or bury it. Whatever she likes” (301). Joe never gives the screw to his mother, since he throws it into a ditch, but Linda’s actions make it clear that she knows that Joe and Cappy killed Linden, and that she is willing to cover up for them. In their willingness to conceal the murder, both Whitey and Linda uphold traditional Anishinaabe justice; members of the community know that Linden had to be killed, since that is the general consensus of the reservation, and they are willing to uphold that consensus, even if it goes against the contemporary U.S. justice system.

Thinking about the ambiguity of Elsie's murderer and about Joe's decision to enact justice brings up Browne's assertion of crime fiction having the ability to stimulate readers' imaginations regarding the possibility of change (Browne 3). Both *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House* present powerful fictional portrayals full of true to life elements, making the stories clear advocates for change. In fact, in an interview, Erdrich was asked, "For non-Native people, the injustice and jurisdictional tangles described in *The Round House* will come as astonishing news. How do Native people—for whom these are daily realities—react?" (Woodard). To this Erdrich responded:

I have had heartbreaking and inspiring responses. One was a letter from a tribal judge, who wrote that she has worked all her life on issues of sovereignty that result in desperately unfair, unworkable, unlivable outcomes for victims of sexual violence—the women and their families. She said she was astounded to read about this in a novel, and it meant a great deal to her to be understood in that manner. I felt the same way about what she said (Woodard).

Not only do *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House* succeed in depicting an accurate portrayal of the issues surrounding sexual violence against Native American women on reservations, but such depictions have the power to make changes in the world outside of the novel. For example, shortly after the publication of *The Round House*, the Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized in 2013. Recognizing the novel's mass appeal and popularity shows some of the powerful ways in which Erdrich imparts knowledge to her readers—a knowledge that encourages taking action for change.

In foregrounding these specific crimes, both Washburn and Erdrich share stories that mimic reality, because so many crimes against Native American women go uninvestigated and

unprosecuted. In this way, these novels adhere to the long tradition of detective novels that illuminate “social justice questions, directly or indirectly,” and more specifically, that these novels are “ideally situated by a long tradition to foreground the many injustices plaguing Indian communities” (*Shaman or Sherlock* 6). While *Elsie’s Business* and *The Round House* do utilize some of the typical conventions of mystery, crime, and detective writing, Washburn and Erdrich also upend some of these prototypical elements by embedding culturally-specific details, which work to indigenize the texts. Washburn also makes use of second person narration, coupled with specific Lakota stories, in order to foreground the role of oral storytelling. Erdrich, on the other hand, incorporates specific details regarding Federal Indian law and traditional Ojibwe justice to highlight the problems inherent in the current justice system within Indian Country. Furthermore, both novels also highlight the larger injustices that have been waged upon Native Americans for centuries, such as the development of Federal Indian law, and the lack of justice for crimes committed against Native Americans. In this way, Washburn and Erdrich use the mystery, crime, and detective novel genre to inform, educate, and raise the consciousness of *all* readers by indigenizing a genre of fiction that is popular and accessible to both mainstream and Native American readers.

### III. MYSTERIES OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT IN LOUIS OWENS'S *THE SHARPEST SIGHT* AND *BONE GAME*

*The Sharpest Sight* (1991) and its follow-up *Bone Game* (1994)—both by Louis Owens—present similarly intricate plots that each contain not one, but at least two concurrent mysteries that convey how crimes of the past are irrevocably linked to crimes of the present. While the books use different elements from the mystery, crime, and detective genre, Owens layers the mysteries presented in the novels to reach different audiences: the traditional whodunit mystery comprises the “simple plot”—the plot that all readers, Native and non-Native alike, can glean—while the “complex plot,” on the other hand, deals with mysteries that are inextricably related to a much larger and more complex network of historical events that directly affected the Indigenous people of North America: European contact, colonization, land theft, and the U.S. federal government’s attempts to eliminate Native cultures (Burke 121). In both books, Cole McCurtain, who is of Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish ancestry, serves as an amateur detective and is aided in his investigations by individuals like Mundo Morales, the town’s deputy sheriff, his family members, including his father Hoey, his great uncle Luther Cole, and his grandmother Onatima, and friends, such as Alex Yazzie, a Navajo professor. The “simple plot” of *The Sharpest Sight* revolves around the disappearance and murder of Attis McCurtain, while the “complex plot” involves Cole conducting investigations about his identity. In *Bone Game*, which takes place twenty years later, the “complex plot” focuses on Cole’s continued search to understand himself, particularly within the context of European colonization, while the “simple plot” follows the serial killings of young women in the Santa Cruz area. In both *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*, Owens presents multiple mysteries—from the past and the present— with

resolutions that convey how identity and cultural knowledge play major roles in the Native American mystery, crime, and detective novel.

Published by the University of Oklahoma Press, *The Sharpest Sight* revolves around the disappearance of Attis McCurtain, a Vietnam veteran of mixed Choctaw, Cherokee, and Irish ancestry. After returning home to Amarga, California from the war, Attis killed his girlfriend, Jenna Nemi, which landed him in the mental hospital. At the beginning of the novel the deputy sheriff of Amarga, Mundo Morales—Attis's best friend as well as a fellow Vietnam veteran—believes he sees Attis's body floating down the Salinas River. Mundo is uncertain about his vision, but when the mental hospital reports Attis missing, he becomes more confident in what he saw. While Mundo functions as the police detective of the story, Cole McCurtain, Attis's younger brother, conducts his own investigation, and serves as an amateur, accidental sleuth—although Cole's detection centers on the mysteries that shroud his understanding of his own mixed-blood identity. To do so, Cole travels to the swamps of Mississippi, where he visits his great uncle Luther Cole, a Choctaw medicine person, and family friend Onatima, who Cole considers a grandmother, a wise Choctaw elder; both Luther and Onatima provide Cole with clues that are critical not only for Cole's understanding of who he is, but also in terms of Attis's disappearance. As the story unfolds, the idiosyncrasies of the characters that make up Amarga become more apparent and potential suspects emerge. There's the Nemi family—Dan, Helen, and Diana—and they have reason to want Attis dead, since he killed their family member, Jenna. There's also Jessard Deal, the owner of the local tavern—the Tiptoe Inn—who is known for his tendency to incite violence and conflict. While Cole is able to develop a better understanding of his identity, the circumstances regarding Attis's death remain unknown at the end of the novel.

Reviewers and critics alike have observed how *The Sharpest Sight* embodies the confluence of three literary genres: 1) Western literary traditions, 2) mystery, crime, and detective fiction, and 3) Native American literature. Owens combines characteristics from these storytelling methods to create a complex narrative that resists clear categorization. By focusing on Owens's allusions to Greek mythology and references to Western literary authors such as Herman Melville, William Shakespeare, and Robert Frost, among others, scholars have analyzed not only how these details allow *The Sharpest Sight* to inhabit a Western space, but also how these details mediate the text for the non-Native reader.<sup>7</sup> Simultaneously, critics and reviewers also acknowledge the important role elements of mystery, crime, and detective fiction play in the novel. In her article, "'A Rose by Any Other Name': A Native American Detective Novel by Louis Owens," Michelle Pagni Stewart argues that in *The Sharpest Sight* "Owens creates his own kind of detective fiction simultaneously within and outside of the genre" (167); part of Stewart's reasoning is based on the fact that the novel "does not hinge on the solution of the crimes" because "Instead, the reader becomes immersed in a multitude of conflicts, connected to the identity of the murderer while also extending beyond it" (173). In his dissertation, *Detecting Colonialism: Detective Fiction in Native American and Sardinian Literatures*, Antonio Giovanni Idini argues that *The Sharpest Sight* utilizes detective fiction conventions to make a commentary upon colonization, and he specifically considers the roles of land, education, and war. In terms of

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<sup>7</sup> For discussions of Owens's use of Western literary techniques, see: Carolyn Holbert's "'Stranded in the Wasteland': Literary Allusion in *The Sharpest Sight*"; Bernadette Rigal-Cellard's "Western Literary Models and Their Native American Revisiting: The Hybrid of Aesthetics of Owens's *The Sharpest Sight*"; Chris LaLonde's "Discerning Connections, Revising the Master Narrative, and Interrogating Identity in Louis Owens's *The Sharpest Sight*"; Margaret Dwyer's "The Syncretic Impulse: Louis Owens' Use of Autobiography, Ethnology, and Blended Mythologies in *The Sharpest Sight*"; and Melody Graulich's "The Salinas Valley: Autobiographical, Critical, and Environmental Musings on John Steinbeck and Louis Owens."

tribally specific elements, scholarship also exists about Owens's inclusion of Chumash cultural references.<sup>8</sup> However, when analyzing *The Sharpest Sight*, it is difficult to attempt to disentangle these generic conventions, as they all overlap to create a complex story. As *L.A. Times* writer Gary Paulsen notes, “the reader might think he is in Tony Hillerman territory, with a half-native cop and mysterious doings—in California, not New Mexico. But this novel . . . is more complex and more ambitious” (Paulsen).

*Bone Game*, which was also published by the University of Oklahoma Press, picks up about twenty years later and features many of the same characters as *The Sharpest Sight*. Cole McCurtain, who is now in his forties and is a divorced father, is working in a one-year professor position of Literature at University of California, Santa Cruz. At the beginning of the novel, Cole learns that there have been several mysterious murders of young women in the areas surrounding campus. Simultaneously, Cole, who is struggling with feelings of isolation and depression, has turned to alcohol and is experiencing dreams of a historical murder: the 1812 killing of Father Quintana, one of the Franciscans at the Santa Cruz Mission. Hoey, Uncle Luther, and Onatima have received messages through their dreams that Cole is in trouble and they make the trip from Mississippi to California to aid their family member. Abby, Cole's daughter, also shows up unexpectedly, because she has decided she wants to attend UC Santa Cruz for college. Meanwhile, Cole befriends a new UC Santa Cruz faculty member, Alex Yazzie, a Harvard-trained anthropologist who also happens to be Navajo. Over the course of the novel, some of the victims' bodies turn up dismembered, while others are found un mutilated, with death caused by a single gun shot—creating a series of brutal yet inconsistent homicides. Together with a team of

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of Owens's inclusion of Chumash cultural references, see: Melody Graulich's “Unearthing the Chumash Presence in *The Sharpest Sight*.”

sleuths, Cole successfully decodes his dreams as well as uncovers who is behind the Santa Cruz serial killings.

Similar to the reviews and scholarship about *The Sharpest Sight*, pieces about *Bone Game* also pick up on the confluence of multiple genres and how complicated the plot is. For example, a piece published by *Kirkus Review* identifies that in *Bone Game*, “Owens returns to his Native American roots for this sprightly thriller, a sequel that lives up to its predecessor” (“Bone Game”). In another review, Brian Hentz notes that the novel is “a tale of mystery and suspense . . . a genre rarely associated with the Native American Renaissance” but that the book “provides for a compelling examination of identity construction” (409). In her article, “*Bone Game’s* Terminal Plots and Healing Stories,” Rochelle Venuto argues that the novel perfectly encapsulates what Owens has discussed in his scholarship: with American Indians becoming authors and in “creating their own narratives to counter the tragic stories written by whites and to imagine more positive futures for Indians” that such writers are purposefully making the Indian the hero (Venuto 24). Again, to attempt to disentangle these genres from one another would disrupt the totality of the narrative, and elements of Western literary traditions, Native American storytelling, and mystery, crime, and detective fiction all work together to create a multi-layered story. And just like with *The Sharpest Sight*, there is no lack of acknowledgement about the complex plot of *Bone Game*. In fact, in an interview, Owens himself identifies this feature: “I took the most risks and experimented most radically. I wanted to write a non-linear novel, one that worked rather like a mosaic. . . . I wanted it to be a story in which all times and all actions coexisted simultaneously” (qtd. in Haladay 57).

Perhaps why *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* both seem to simultaneously inhabit multiple genres relates to Owens’s own experiences as a reader. Despite the fact that both novels

are often called murder-mystery novels, Owens interestingly had little experience with mystery and detective fiction. When Owens began writing fiction, he talks about his process:

You probably should have asked me why I choose mystery or the crime novel genre for my fiction. I would have replied that I never intended to do that. I am not a reader of mysteries or crime novels, never in fact having read one before I began writing.

However, in my fiction I wanted to write books that my father and my brothers and sisters would read, that is, novels with plots as opposed to precious symbolist poetry going on page after page. (Browne 256)

This statement speaks to the popularity and accessibility of the mystery, crime, and detective genre, and supports the contention that Native authors use this genre to reach a wide audience of readers in order to inform and raise awareness about American Indian issues. Furthermore, Owens's comments pose questions about how popular fiction and literary fiction may overlap. Owens states,

*The Sharpest Sight*, for example, can be and has been read as a crime novel or mystery, and left at that. It received the Roman Noir prize for the best "noir" novel published in France in 1995. However, perceptive readers will discover the centrality of not just a large dose of Choctaw mythology but also Indo-European mythology, the two mixed inseparably I hope. (Browne 256)

This quote perfectly encapsulates American Indian mystery, crime, and detective fiction. Both *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* provide examples of murder-mystery stories, but the plots are also inextricably tied up with questions of identity—particularly questions about mixed-blood identity. In *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*, Owens is successful at not only writing murder-mystery stories, but also in complicating some of the typical elements that define the

mystery and detective genre; Owens does so by embedding cultural information and posing larger questions about identity, American history, and colonization.

Because so much of the existing scholarship not only identifies the ways in which *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* inhabit multiple genre spaces, but also that such overlap creates complex stories, it is important to consider the ways in which Owens fuses elements of mystery, crime, and detective fiction with Native American contexts to create complicated narratives. Even though critics have analyzed these texts as detective fiction, the existing scholarship does not consider some of the typical conventions of the detective genre and the specific ways in which Owens plays with said conventions. As a result, this chapter pays particular attention to the opening of each novel, the detectives and the forms of reasoning used, as well as how each story resolves. Furthermore, in examining *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* simultaneously, Owens's focus on how the crimes of the past are inextricably linked to crimes of the present becomes even more evident, since Owens employs many of the same characters in each book, and since Attis's death, which drives the "simple plot" of *The Sharpest Sight* continues to loom in *Bone Game*.

The first aspect of mystery, crime, and detective fiction to consider is the opening, and like many mystery and detective novels, *The Sharpest Sight* opens with the presentation of a puzzle. When the narrative opens, Mundo Morales, Amarga's deputy sheriff, is on duty, patrolling near the river when he sees something float by:

sliding slowly from beneath the bridge, was a face. The long black hair washed away from the forehead, and the eyes were open and fixed. He saw the dark eyes and broad-nose and the mouth drawn back over white teeth and the body like one of the drowned logs swinging slowly so that now the feet aimed north. (6)

Before Mundo can attempt to remove the body from the river and identify it, the body has floated away. Mundo struggles with what he saw, or with what he *thinks* he saw, and after getting out a spotlight and searching the river, he thinks “that it must be what he’d heard about, what so many of them had. Hallucination. Craziness. Post-Traumatic stress. . . . He’d seen Attis in the hospital just a week before. Attis wasn’t in the river” (24). While Mundo grapples with what he saw in the river, Owens confirms to the reader that Mundo wasn’t having a vision, because Attis is, indeed, in the river: “Attis McCurtain spun in the river, riding the black flood, aware of the branches that trailed over his face and touched his body . . . He knew he was dead” (8). As is common for the genre, Owens uses the opening of the novel to present a mysterious death, but Owens provides an additional layer since he embeds dramatic irony; the reader knows that Attis is dead, but Mundo questions what he saw, believing that it was a vision caused from his experiences in the war. In this way, Owens provides the reader “knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant” and this is significant because the confirmed presence of a corpse is critical to the mystery and detective genre (Abrams 167). As explained in *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, “[b]ecause the unnatural dispatch of the victim produces the occasion for detection, the corpse has instrumental importance—the story cannot be imagined without it” (Herbert 92). Without a body, and without confirmation regarding his vision, Mundo’s investigation is stalled, since the characters that populate the storyworld of *The Sharpest Sight* are uncertain that Attis has indeed been murdered.

Regardless if Mundo knows Attis is dead or not, the reader does, and thus Owens has presented the first mystery of the novel—a mystery of the present. Shortly thereafter Owens embeds an additional mystery to be considered—a mystery related to events of the past: Cole

McCurtain is facing an identity crisis. Cole muses over his identity claiming, “I am a half-breed, like my father,” but reconsiders as he explains,

I am a three-eighths breed, since my mother is a quarter Cherokee like just about everybody who ever lived in Oklahoma . . . Well, you see, the fact is she’s really three-eighths Cherokee, since her mother was three-quarters . . . So I guess that makes me a seven-sixteenths breed—almost a half breed like my father. Let’s say, I’m nearly a half-breed, whatever that means. (10)

Even though Cole is acutely aware of his blood quantum breakdown, he struggles in interpreting who he is, what he is, and if he gets any choice in the matter. Hoey understands that he hasn’t provided the most or the best information about his son’s identity and explains to Cole, “I been trying to remember more things, and read things, things that are Indian. I guess if I grew up over in Ireland and knew more about being Irish, I might choose that. I’m not pretending I’m not a halfbreed. The damned trouble is I don’t know very much. I didn’t listen well enough back then” (59). When Hoey suggests that Cole go to Mississippi and spend some time with Uncle Luther, Hoey’s reasons relate to the evils of the war and that he doesn’t want to lose another son to Vietnam. When Cole responds to Hoey by saying “I’ll think about it,” he is “puzzled by his attraction to the idea”; Cole is less interested in dodging the draft and is more curious about learning who he is as a mixed-blood person (23). In fact, Idini argues that in *The Sharpest Sight*, Owens “expands the basic features of the murder mystery to provide a commentary on the history of colonization of native people” and Owens is able to achieve this goal through the inclusion of the second mystery—the mystery surrounding Cole’s identity (278).

While *The Sharpest Sight* clearly conforms to the typical detective fiction opening—with the presentation of a puzzle—in *Bone Game*, Owens chooses to present the concurrent mysteries

in a way that more clearly underscores the relationship between crimes of the past to crimes of the present. As Idini notes, “The very first page of the novel juxtaposes the murder of the priest in 1812 and the murders happening in the contemporary time in the form of historical or journalistic information” (285). Owens writes,

October 15, 1812. *Government Surgeon Manuel Quijano, accompanied by six armed men, is dispatched from the presidio in Monterey with orders to exhume the body of Padre Andres Quintana at the mission of Santa Cruz, La Exaltacion de la Santa Cruz. The priest is found to have been murdered, tortured in pudendis, and hanged.*

November 1, 1993. *The dismembered body of a young woman begins washing ashore on the beaches of Santa Cruz, California.* (3, italics original)

This juxtaposition reveals the complexity of the plot of *Bone Game* and also shows how Owens deviates from the traditional aspects of the detective fiction genre. According to *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, “[i]n most classic crime and mystery fiction, plot is both chronological and linear” (Herbert 331). Owens strays from this convention, since the epigraph makes a link between the “torture and murder of the Spanish missionary priest Padre Andres Quintana at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the murder and mutilation of a young woman at the end of the twentieth” (Fritsch and Gymnich 209). The epigraph explicitly sets crimes of the past next to crimes of the present, and suggests to the reader that a link exists between them.

The connection between these two seemingly unrelated events is further underscored in the first chapter when it is revealed that the events from 1812 are showing up in Cole’s dreams. Cole is haunted by dreams in which a Gambler, a black-and-white painted Ohlone Indian, offers him bones; this particular individual is known as Venancio Asisara, a spiritual leader of the

Ohlone, and one of Father Quintana's victims. Cole simultaneously dreams of interactions between the Ohlone and Father Quintana, and how Quintana not only exploited the Ohlone, but also how he raped a young woman, and how Venancio Asisara decided to torture and violently kill the father. As Fritsch and Gymnich point out in regard to Cole and his dreams, "What is particularly disturbing for him is the fact that in his dreams he experiences events from opposed points of view simultaneously" (210). Cole states,

The strangest thing . . . is that I'm both of them. . . . I'm the priest whipping the Indian's back to a bloody pulp, and I feel every second of it. And I love it. I want to kill them all and spread their guts out to dry . . . And it's me tied to the tree and getting my back cut to shreds, feeling like somebody's raking the flesh off my bones with steel claws and hating the priest and everything around me. (*Bone Game* 95)

Even though *Bone Game* takes place twenty years after *The Sharpest Sight*, the points of view Cole experiences in his dreams convey that he continues to struggle with his identity as a mixed-blood person. The fact that Cole experiences the dream through the eyes of the priest *and* through the eyes of the Ohlone individual represents his own perception of having a fragmented identity: his ancestry is a mix of Indigenous and European blood, which means that his ancestors were both the oppressed and the oppressors. In this way, while Cole gained some understanding about his identity by the end of *The Sharpest Sight*, his dreams signify that his understanding is still shrouded in mystery. As a result, Cole's intense dreams provide him information about historical events he knows little to nothing about, and they prompt "him to find out more about the past of the place where he lives" (Fritsch and Gymnich 210).

In fact, Owens's decision to foreground the narrative about Father Quintana directly supports Venuto's assertion about American Indian writers working to change the commonly-

accepted narrative. In “The Assassination of Padre Andres Quintana by the Indians of Mission Santa Cruz in 1812: The Narrative of Lorenzo Asisara,” editor Edward D. Castillo notes that “Historical literature on the California Indians in the Franciscan mission system has been decidedly unbalanced. . . . These works generally approve of European colonization and the triumph of Christianity over ‘pagans’ and their natural world” (117). Castillo elaborates that some of the literature “seeks to rationalize the mission’s destruction of thousands of natives in order to convert or assimilate them” and that such works reflect “the outright bigotry that for years typified the stereotypical views of whites about American natives” (117). Castillo also explains the brutality of the missions by stating that, “One cannot truly comprehend the nature of these institutions without realizing that, once the natives were brought to the missions, they were not free to leave” (118). Daily regimens included manual labor, Christian worship, beatings, and incarceration; furthermore, European-introduced diseases killed thousands of California natives (Castillo 118). However, Native resistance also surfaced in these settings, and individuals turned to stock raiding and guerilla warfare to fight back (Castillo 118). Often, revolts led to attempted murders of Franciscans and one of the most sensational assassinations was that of Father Andres Quintana, the narrative that Owens embeds in this novel.

At the same time Cole is experiencing these dreams, a present day serial killer is on the loose in Santa Cruz. While the reader learns of the present day murders in the epigraph, the details are more fully sketched out early in the novel when Cole heads to his office on campus. Cole is puzzled by a sign that instructs: “When possible . . . girls especially, stay in dorms after midnight with doors locked. If you must be out at night—walk in pairs. DON’T HITCH A RIDE, PLEASE! If you feel you must hitch a ride—do it with a friend, but NOT ALONE. Try to choose cars with University parking decals” (16). Cole is not aware of what this sign is referring

to until his teaching assistant, Robert Malin, informs him that “Several students are missing. Parts of a woman washed up on three different beaches in the last couple of days” (17). And while Cole recognizes that these crimes are “Beyond terrible”, his response to the news speaks loudly about his current mental state (18). Cole keeps Tecate beer and a pint of Jack Daniels in his desk and when Robert leaves his office, Cole “picked a can from the drawer and levered the tab open, thinking of the girl they’d found in the sea, imagining a story that could end that way. Somewhere in that story was a moment of shrieking horror so great it struck at his soul. And again, he felt the strange sense of responsibility, a terrible weight” (20-21). Cole’s “sense of responsibility” relates to his dreams and his desire to better understand these crimes of the past, and while Cole “does not even consider undertaking a deliberate investigation of the serial murders that occur around the Santa Cruz campus” his spiritual and personal quest “contributes to the discovery of the killers and thus to a solution of the mystery” (Fritsch and Gymnich 210).

The openings of *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* both present crimes of the now: in *The Sharpest Sight*, the reader knows that Attis is dead, even if the characters of the storyworld do not, and in *Bone Game*, a serial killer is targeting young women in the Santa Cruz area. Both sets of crimes are juxtaposed with Cole’s sense of uncertainty about his own identity as a mixed-blood person. And while the sets of mysteries Owens sketches in both texts seem unrelated, the crimes of the present are only solved, or solved to an extent, *because* of Cole’s investigation into his own identity—investigations that cause him to look to the past for clues. In *The Sharpest Sight*, Cole’s trip to Mississippi and what he learns from Uncle Luther and Onatima ultimately allow him to uncover Attis’s corpse, and in *Bone Game*, Cole’s exploration of his Native identity, through ceremonies and teachings from Alex, Luther, and Onatima are what lead him and his team of sleuths to uncover the Santa Cruz serial killers.

Since both *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* present crimes of the past and crimes of the present, there comes a need for a multitude of sleuths. Both texts portray “a community of relatives and friends who are influential in achieving a solution. The narrative function of the detective is fulfilled by a multiplicity of characters, family and friends, from a variety of ethnic backgrounds . . . This stresses the necessity of a communal effort in solving the crimes (Idini 310). In *The Sharpest Sight*, the main detectives of interest are Mundo Morales and Cole, who employ their own unique forms of detection. Because Mundo and Cole set out to solve separate, yet related mysteries, their means of reasoning differ greatly: Mundo exhibits traditional investigative protocol, such as interviewing individuals, while Cole must listen to Uncle Luther to learn about his Choctaw heritage.

In terms of the traditional whodunit mystery, or the “simple plot” of the novel, Mundo Morales fulfills the role of a conventional detective, most specifically the police procedural. Despite the fact that the FBI is involved in the case, and wants no help from local law enforcement, Mundo remains motivated to solve the crime. Not only is Mundo a deputy sheriff, but he considered Attis his best friend. Mundo asserts, “I’ll find Attis . . . And I’ll find out. What was done and who did it . . . Murder is against the law, no matter why it’s done. I’ll find out” (52). Even though Mundo operates as the more traditional detective in this story, he is still somewhat of an amateur. Time and time again, Mundo is reminded of his former job as a janitor, and the fact that he has only been a police officer for a short amount of time. For example, a fellow sheriff says to Mundo, “How you like being a full-time deputy? Beats hell out of cleaning toilets, don’t it?” (39).

Cole, on the other hand, is an amateur and accidental detective, and like some of the other amateur/accidental sleuths discussed in this project, he is a family member of the victim;

however, on the surface, Cole's investigation revolves around uncovering details about his own identity rather than being specifically about his brother's murder. At the same time, Cole's investigation into himself is directly linked to the disappearance and presumed murder of Attis, since Cole's process of inquiry helps him learn how to cope with his brother's death from a Choctaw perspective. Cole's visit to Mississippi, and the information and lessons he learns from Luther and Onatima are invaluable, not only in terms of helping Cole understand who he is, but also in terms of finding Attis's body. Unlike Mundo's forms of reasoning, Cole relies largely upon the ability to listen, as Hoey instructs Cole in regard to Luther: "You got a chance to listen to him now. Maybe you can learn some of the things I never learned. . . . Just watch and listen, and remember that the old man don't teach only by talking" (59). With these goals in mind, Mundo and Cole set out on their own separate investigations.

Despite Mundo being a novice, one particular instance of Mundo enacting traditional investigative methods occurs early in the novel when he heads to the Nemi ranch to question Dan and Helen about Attis's escape. For Mundo, the Nemis seem like the obvious suspects, since it was their daughter who Attis killed. Mundo thinks to himself: the Nemis "killed him . . . They killed him because he murdered their girl. . . . That was simple wasn't it? Nothing complicated about it" (33). When he inquires whether the Nemis know anything about Attis's disappearance, Dan and Helen are initially surprised, but then turn to denial that Attis is gone. Helen offers that "Maybe they just lost him, you know, misplaced him out there in that great big hospital" (49). Later in the conversation, Helen again states, "I'll bet he's still out there at the hospital . . . Just misplaced. I'm always amazed at the things I lose around this little house" (50). Helen is reticent to believe that Attis is dead and part of this relates to the fact that there is no body. Despite the lack of a body, Mundo gathers Dan and Helen's alibis and informs them that he saw Attis's body

floating down the river the night before. Again, the Nemis appear to be in denial. Dan responds by saying, “In my war some of the boys got hit pretty hard, too. We called it shell shock then, or battle fatigue . . . You see things, hear things. The mind plays bad tricks” (52). While this scene fails to prove whether Dan and Helen are guilty, the opaqueness of their responses let them remain possible suspects, especially since they have a motive to kill Attis.

As Mundo conducts his investigation, the reader is once again privy to information that Mundo is not, creating dramatic irony that allows the reader to “guess at or solve a puzzle . . . ponder motives and impulses to murder,” ultimately engaging the reader with the story (Mansfield-Kelley & Marchino 3). An example of this occurs in Chapter Sixteen, which reveals that Attis escaped from the hospital with the help of an orderly whom was “a conscientious objector serving in the hospital” (92). The orderly informs Attis of a hole in the fence, and once through that hole Attis would be able to head toward the river, where Cole and Hoey would allegedly be waiting for him. When Attis balks at the suggestion, the orderly continues to encourage Attis to escape: “It’s your chance . . . If you don’t take it they’ll keep you in here the rest of your life. They don’t trust Indians. They’ll keep frying your brains with electricity until you’ve got tapioca behind your eyes” (92-3). When Attis finally agrees to this plan, “the orderly seemed relieved and happy” and “thought that it would be a good thing to help the Indian escape” (93). The reader learns that the orderly’s insistence results from “the money he was being paid to arrange the thing” (94). Whether the orderly knows about Attis’s impending murder is unclear, but the reader has gained an important clue regarding the circumstances of Attis’s disappearance: someone had coordinated with the orderly to make Attis escape. Furthermore, the reader also learns important information about Attis’s death, since the reader learns that Attis was killed by gunshot: “He felt the bullet enter his heart, striking suddenly to his

center, and he fell backwards into the water” (94). This again confirms to the reader that Attis has been murdered, but for Mundo and the other characters of *The Sharpest Sight*, the lack of a body makes solving a homicide particularly difficult.

While Mundo is attempting to solve Attis’s disappearance/murder, Cole heads to Mississippi, not only to evade the draft, but to also learn about his identity. One specific clue that Cole learns from his time in Mississippi has to do with Choctaw beliefs regarding death. Uncle Luther asks Cole, “You know about the *shilombish*, grandson?” (100, italics original). When Cole says no, Onatima declares to Luther, “You and that nephew have neglected this boy’s education” (110). Onatima’s statement underscores the gravity of Cole’s identity crisis; Cole is aware that he is a mixed-blood person, but his lack of knowledge about the specifics of his identity prevent him from having a clear understanding of his heritage. Onatima then explains what *shilombish* means:

Every person has two shadows, grandson, an inside shadow and an outside one. When a person dies, the inside shadow, the *shilombish*—that’s kind of like what white people call the soul—goes wherever it’s supposed to go. Most people’s inside shadow goes to a good place where there’s always plenty of game to hunt and it’s never cold and people play ball games all year round. A person who’s murdered someone can’t go to that place. That person’s *shilombish* goes to a different place where the earth is hard and dry and nothing grows. The inside shadow is taken down a black river full of snakes to a place where all the trees are dead and the people cry and suffer all the time. (110-11, italics original)

With this clear explication, Onatima serves as a filter, and not only does Cole receive an education about Choctaw culture, but so too does the reader. This straightforward explanation of

tribally-specific information is not always embedded in Native-authored texts, but Owens chooses to include it here, since it's an integral aspect of Cole's detection process.

Cole's Choctaw education continues; with *shilombish* explained, Onatima now must explicate the other shadow to Cole. She states, "Now the outside shadow, the *shilup*, is different. It stays around the dead person's body and scares people. It's similar to what white people call a ghost. That's what you've been noticing stirring around in the corner" (111, italics original). Once Onatima explains this, Cole notices a shadow in the corner, but Onatima assures him that it's not something to be afraid of because, "It's the *shilup*, that's all. And it's waiting for its bones" (111, italics original). Onatima continues to share what needs to be done now that Attis is dead and that his *shilup* lingers in the corner: she instructs Cole, "You have to find the bones, grandson. . . . He's waiting for his bones, and he can't go on until we bring them back" (113). As a result, Cole has a mission he needs to accomplish: he must find his brother's bones and bring them back to Mississippi. Cole's mission is directly linked to establishing Attis's case as a murder, since his goal revolves around locating Attis's body—something that has not yet been discovered, despite both Mundo's and the FBI's separate investigations.

Cole's mission to find his brother's bones fulfills important roles not only in terms of Choctaw cultural practices, but also for the U.S. system of law. The presence of a corpse is critical in establishing that Attis's case is indeed a homicide, and not just an incident of a missing person. Furthermore, Owens's decision to "take the corpse offstage," so to speak, simultaneously works to distance the violence, but also creates a hiccup in the investigations, particularly in terms of the FBI's perspective (Herbert 92). The FBI agent assigned to Attis's case is Lee Scott, and while he only plays a minimal role in the novel, he makes it clear how the organization feels about seeking justice for Attis. Scott, a veteran himself, tells Cole, "I know that it doesn't matter

who killed your brother. . . . They sent me to make sure that your brother never surfaced again. They want him controlled and invisible. He's too fucking embarrassing to them. You see, they were afraid he was loose and was going to dance the ghost dance some more and remind people. Now they want those bones so they can be sure" (254). Scott makes it clear that he was never searching for Attis's murderer; rather, the FBI's concern revolved around keeping Attis under control, so that he wouldn't kill anyone else, which raises questions about the possibility of the FBI participating in Attis's murder. The discovery of Attis's remains would confirm to the FBI that Attis is no longer a threat to society.

In *Bone Game*, a team of sleuths also carries out the process of detection. At the beginning of the novel, it is evident how Cole has changed over time; his heavy drinking conveys that he is not well; he faces a "profound sense of isolation, of being cut away from his relatives; the sensation of being caught in-between two worlds; a fixation with the past, compounded by an equally strong desire to get away from it" (Idini 289). A perfect example of Cole's state of mind is encapsulated by a statement he makes to himself when he wakes up from one of his dreams in the first chapter: "*Shilombish* or *shilup*? Which is which? . . . My words flee like rabbits, Grandmother" (9, italics original). Since the concepts of *shilombish* and *shilup* play major roles in *The Sharpest Sight*, the fact that Cole can no longer distinguish between them shows how he has lost comprehension of his identity and how he must conduct another personal investigation.

While Hoey, Uncle Luther, and Onatima, play a role in the detection of this novel, as they do in *The Sharpest Sight*, there are also new characters that aid in the detection process, and all of these individuals could be classified as amateur sleuths. One of the new characters that assists Cole in his investigation is Alex Yazzie. Early in the novel, Cole is in his office talking to a

student when he gets a call from the dean asking for his help with another Native American faculty member. When Cole arrives on the scene, he sees the carcass of a deer hanging from a mulberry tree and a “dark, wiry young man with a long black ponytail, wearing only a black pleated skirt and running shoes with no socks, was skinning the animal, laying the hide off expertly with a large, curved knife” (24-5). This individual is Alex Yazzie, a cross-dressing Navajo, and the only other Native American faculty member at UC Santa Cruz. As a result, Cole feels he can trust Alex, and they become friends, and Cole eventually asks him what he might know about the content of Cole’s dreams. Alex is able to shed some light on Cole’s mysterious dreams, and he explains: “Padre Andres Quintana? He’s somewhat famous around here. He was one of the Franciscans at the old Santa Cruz Mission. In 1812 the Indians killed him when they couldn’t take his cruelty anymore. According to the Ohlone people in the mission he was a cruel bastard; he used a whip with wire ends to shred their backs” (52).

Because Alex provides Cole with contextual information about the 1812 murders, he directly aids in Cole’s investigation. However, “Alex is also one of the various red herrings the novel indicates as possible culprits,” since Alex engages in trickster behavior such as cross-dressing, getting Cole a dog and naming it Custer, and taking Cole out to the bars, despite Cole’s drinking problem (Idini 312). Even though Alex seems like a possible suspect at times, he also helps Cole reconnect with his Native American heritage. One specific way Alex intervenes in Cole’s life is through encouraging Cole to participate in a sweat lodge ceremony. Cole is reluctant to partake, but with support and enthusiasm from his family members, he decides to do so. During the ceremony, Cole “closed his burning eyes and in the darkness he saw the painted man and then a rearing bear, and then bear and man merged into a single, one-dimensional figure like a shadow puppet that seemed to be reaching toward him” (164). The meaning of this vision

is left for the reader to interpret, but it has clearly disturbed Cole. Once the sweat lodge ceremony is finished, “Cole stood apart from the others. He shivered . . . His body felt empty, like a woven basket set out to dry” (164). Emil Redbull, the person who conducted the sweat, informs Cole that “We just got to empty ourself of the stuff that gets in the way, and sometimes we don’t know it worked till a long time later. . . . You got something important to do here. I don’t know what it is, but anybody can feel it. Lucky thing you got help” (164-65). Participating in a sweat lodge ceremony works as part of Cole’s investigation because Cole needs to take the time to meditate on his issues, and to contemplate not only why he is feeling lost and isolated, but to also consider the significance of the dreams he is having, and what they have to do with the murders taking place in Santa Cruz.

Alex also encourages Cole to participate in a Native American Church ceremony in which peyote is used. After Cole takes peyote, Onatima passes the rattle to him, signifying his turn to conduct a prayer, but Cole struggles with this: “He stared at the fire, his stomach leaping and flaring just like the bitter flames. He remembered the sweat ceremony and tried to fight back a sense of panic. Frantically he searched his mind for an appropriate prayer” but only song lyrics came to mind (197). Despite Cole’s inability to lead a prayer, the ceremony aids in his detection process, because he experiences another important vision while the peyote is working:

The gambler sat cross-legged on the ground at the edge of the village. A cape of raven feathers covered his shoulders, and an abalone shell necklace hung upon his painted chest. He looked up at Cole’s approach, and smiled, holding out both hands with the palms open. In the right hand Cole saw the painted bone. (199)

This vision resembles the dreams Cole is having and this particular moment is powerful for Cole because when Cole approaches the Gambler, he “looked directly into Cole’s eyes, and Cole

looked back into the brown eyes of Attis, his brother” (200). This evidence suggests that the struggles Cole has been experiencing, as well as the dreams Cole has been having, relate to his brother, and are irrevocably tied up to the plot of *The Sharpest Sight*. In other words, the crimes of the past are inextricably tied to the crimes of the present. Owens brings all the crimes together here, since this vision unites Attis’s murder with Cole’s current dreams about Santa Cruz and the destruction waged upon the Ohlone; the crimes against the Ohlone are inscribed upon the land where Cole lives, which is also where the current serial killings are taking place. All of this is connected to Cole’s perennial quest for understanding his mixed-blood identity—since his ancestry is comprised of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry. Like Cole’s dreams in which he is simultaneously Father Quintana and the Ohlone Indian, Cole is descended from both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Alex is not the only one who aids Cole in his investigations; Cole’s family members assist him as well. In addition to the sweat lodge and the Native American Church ceremony, Uncle Luther and Onatima provide Cole with more information about his Choctaw identity. For example, Uncle Luther explicates part of Cole’s dreams, particularly in regard to the Gambler, Venancio Asisara: “It’s that bone game. He’s come back to gamble for this world” (71). When Cole engages with the Gambler and plays during the peyote ceremony, “he survives the bone game unharmed, Cole apparently has made the right choice in what is presumably a game of life and death” (Fritsch & Gymnich 211). However, this encounter is not the end of the Gambler, but merely a vision, providing Cole with instructions as to how he should handle the Gambler in a future encounter. Luther explains to Cole that “The gambler wants power, Grandson. And he thinks you brung it to him. He thinks you are a warrior like him. . . . Only thing is, don’t say his

name no more. He wants you to say his name” (209). These words from Luther also provide Cole with clues as to how to act when he encounters the gambler.

Onatima also aids in Cole’s investigation, and instead of focusing on the gambler, she explains to Cole that his dreams relate to his brother’s death. She states,

It’s not wrong to survive. I see Indians all the time who are ashamed of surviving, and they don’t even know it. We have survived a five-hundred-year war in which millions of us were starved to death, burned in our homes, shot and killed with disease and alcohol. . . . You only have to realize that what Luther told you many years ago is true. You carry your brother inside you; he never left you. He wants you to be happy. (165)

With this information, Cole knows he must go on, try to understand the significance of his dreams, and use that knowledge to solve the murders happening in Santa Cruz.

In addition to helping Cole with his dreams, some of Cole’s family members conduct their own investigation about a different crime, and work to ensure that justice is served. On their drive from Mississippi to California, Hoey and Luther witness the kidnapping of an Indian woman by three men. At first Hoey wants to report the crime to the police, but Luther is convinced that “It won’t do no good . . . to tell the police” because “The police don’t care about Indians. This town is full of drunk Indians. The police will look at you and see you’re just a Indian, too. Mixed-bloods and fullbloods is all the same” (117). So instead of reporting the crime to the police, Hoey and Luther decide to enact their own justice. Hoey and Luther follow the van of kidnapers, and when it pulls over at a rest stop, Hoey and Luther stop there and follow the men to the restroom. Armed with Hoey’s deer rifle, they enter the restroom and Luther tells the kidnapers that “You can all stop that pissing now if you want” (126). The kidnapers are scared and do as they are told; Hoey and Luther make the men get naked, tie them up, and place them in

their van. Once the kidnapers are restrained, Hoey and Luther rescue the kidnapped woman. Luther then drives the van full of kidnapers for about an hour, pulls over on the side of the road, and unties them, leaving them to figure out where they are and to drive away on their own. Afterward Hoey and Luther bring the kidnapped woman home. This is an example of how Luther and Hoey enact justice from a Choctaw worldview, which is a deviation from how evil is often treated in Western society, as well as in non-Native mystery, crime, and detective novels. Hoey says to Luther, “Remember what you always said about evil? . . . How you can’t kill it, and it’s the white man’s way to try? That all we can do is be conscious of it?” (154). Instead of attempting to eliminate evil, Hoey and Luther know they cannot destroy it, but that they can attempt to restore balance, which is one of the main points of both *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*.

In both *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*, Owens employs detectives and forms of detection that recognize the interconnectedness of crimes of the past and crimes of the present. One way Owens does this is through connections between the detectives, their identities, and their relationship to the land. For example, in *The Sharpest Sight* Owens invokes the Chumash when Hoey tells Cole, “This all used to be Chumash country, you know . . . Everything you see. And now there ain’t no Chumash here at all, and we’re here” (19). In *Bone Game*, Owens invokes the Ohlone through Cole’s haunting dreams. Furthermore, similar to Cole, Mundo also conducts a small investigation about his ancestry. When the Mondragon sisters—a set of dead elderly twins Mundo can see—convince Mundo to come up to their apartment to talk with them, they show him a complex genealogical tree they have created. Because of this, Mundo realizes that one of his ancestors was a Chumash woman, who was a slave his great-grandfather had taken from the mission. With this information in mind, Mundo realizes that he, like Cole, is a

mixed-blood person. This raises questions for Mundo: he imagined “the young Chumash girl, one of his grandmothers, taken by the brutal patron. Or had it been love? Maybe the great man had rescued her from pain and taken her to his heart? Maybe she had ruled the heart of the man, and his relations had ostracized her in death for that reason” (230-31). Even though Mundo does not uncover Attis’s murder, the knowledge he gains about his identity underscores the notion that the present and the past are inextricably linked, and that issues like identity are never easily solved.

The final convention of the mystery, crime, and detective genre that this chapter takes into consideration is the resolution. According to *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, the “resolution section of a detective novel occurs just after the solution to a crime is revealed and the perpetrator is identified” (Herbert 384). In *The Sharpest Sight*, Owens resists this convention because neither Mundo nor Cole uncovers the identity of Attis’s murderer. However, just because the characters of the storyworld appear to remain ignorant of this fact, Owens once again employs dramatic irony in providing the reader with information that neither detective necessarily knows. In Chapter Forty-Five, Jessard Deal kidnaps Diana Nemi, ties her up, quotes Tennyson to her, and makes oblique comments to her such as, “Your potential, Diana, is unlimited. You’re growing into your evil, learning who you are. Aren’t you?” (235). Jessard then implies that Diana was behind Attis’s murder: he states, “Perhaps you can advise me. After all, you knew what to do with Attis, didn’t you?” (236). Diana neither confirms nor denies this statement, but Jessard continues to make statements that make the reader question Diana’s innocence: “Perhaps they’ll want to know why you withdrew an unusually large sum of money from your college account? Remember that pudgy intern at the hospital, the one somebody paid to make certain things possible? He feels guilty, poor boy” (236). Jessard proceeds to beat Diana

up and rape her, ultimately causing the reader to question Jessard's behavior. Perhaps the scene suggests there's no validity to Jessard's claims, since his behavior is violent and bizarre, and that Diana had nothing to do with Attis's murder, and that Jessard may actually be the guilty party. On the other hand, this scene could also suggest that Diana relied on Jessard to help her commit the crime, since he knows some of the specific details, such as the money being removed from her account to pay the orderly. Finally, the scene could also mean that Diana is in fact the culprit behind Attis's murder. As Idini notes, "It is symptomatic that the end of the book does not provide an easily identifiable culprit but a series of possible stories that the character and the reader can create" (273). This open-ended closing is one major way in which *The Sharpest Sight* does not conform to the typical conventions of mystery, crime, and detective fiction.

In addition to the violent encounter between Jessard and Diana, Owens further complicates the typical murder-mystery ending by creating a scene that follows in which both Dan Nemi and Jessard Deal die. Dan gets wind of Jessard's violence toward Diana, and heads to the Tiptoe Inn to seek revenge. After the confrontation, Owens writes,

the official story was the obvious one. Jessard Deal had raped a girl. When the girl's father raged into the tavern, Jessard killed him. When Jessard tried to kill a deputy sheriff, Hoey McCurtain saved the deputy's life. It was a simple story. A half-breed missing from a mental hospital failed to complicate the story significantly. (262)

The "official story" highlights the fact that Attis's murder gets lost in the shuffle of conflicts that occur at the end of the novel—a point that underscores the lack of interest law enforcement has often had in aiding Native peoples.

In fact, the notion that Attis's death is forgotten suggests that his murder may have restored harmony, particularly within the Choctaw worldview. Luther speculates that, "Hoey's

son killed that girl and so her folks killed him” (96). Part of why Luther believes this relates to Choctaw cultural practices: “Hoey thinks he’s got to revenge his son’s death . . . That’s the way he thinks it’s ‘sposed to be. Us Choctaws you know, have always believed in blood revenge. Somebody kills your relative, you got to kill that person or one of his relatives” (96). And yet, despite adhering to many traditional Choctaw practices, Luther does not want Hoey to do this; he tells Cole, “my nephew is wrong. You must go back and prevent this thing or else it will go out into the world” (96). Perhaps why Luther wants to stop the string of murders has to do with the fact that harmony is now restored; Attis killed Jenna Nemi, and now Attis has been murdered by Jenna’s family. An additional layer is added with the nearly simultaneous deaths of Dan and Jessard; perhaps their deaths suggest their involvement in Attis’s death, or perhaps Jessard is being punished for his sexual assault of Diana. While the reader can speculate, the text does not provide a clear explanation of who was behind Attis’s murder.

In terms of Cole and his search to understand his identity, the police eventually locate him in Mississippi, apprehend him, and bring him back to California for draft evasion. However, prior to this, Uncle Luther and Onatima have made Cole’s most important job clear: he must find his brother’s bones. Cole has received an education about his identity, and while it is not a complete or comprehensive education, Cole knows more about who he is and what his next step must be. Cole is able to pursue this mission, because a heart murmur makes him fail the military’s physical, and once this occurs, he begins to look for his brother’s bones more diligently. And, ultimately, Cole discovers Attis’s bones; after walking the dried riverbed multiple times, “he broke through a tangle of brush into a small clearing . . . Attis’s body lay cupped in the branches ten feet off the ground” (251). Cole observes that “Attis lay as if he had been placed there with loving precision. The thick mat of branches had kept him secure. The

force of the river had stripped the body of clothing, and what was left was mostly bone” (252). As Cole has been instructed to do, he gathers his brother’s bones: “holding his breath against the smell . . . he fought back his fear and nausea . . . he folded the jacket as tightly as he could and knotted the sleeves to hold it shut” (252). Cole has completed part of his mission, and now he must make the journey back to Mississippi. Even though Cole’s investigation seems to end concretely, Owens makes it clear that understanding one’s identity is a lifelong process, which is why Cole must return to the Choctaw ancestral homeland, and spend more time with his father, Uncle Luther, and Onatima.

The ending, or resolution, of *Bone Game* is far more typical for the mystery and detective genre than the ending of *The Sharpest Sight*. While the first book of the series remains open-ended in terms of who killed Attis—at least for the characters that populate the storyworld of the novel—*Bone Game* provides more closure. As a result, the solution to “Cole’s troubles—and, incidentally, to the killings which have affected the Santa Cruz area—are brought about through a combined effort involving Cole’s family and friends” (Idini 283). In other words, in *Bone Game*, both mysteries are solved.

Cole uses his family’s help to identify the killers, because not only is there one killer, but there are two working concurrently, and both of them have connections to Cole. The first murderer to be uncovered is Paul Kantner, a non-traditional student who was formerly in the Army Special Forces, and is enrolled in Cole’s modernism class. Paul is described as “Older than most of his classmates by a dozen years or more” and he “hulked over the room, at least six foot six or seven, putting out a strange animosity with his bright eyes and short, wild red hair” (15). When Abby comes to town, she sits in on her father’s classes, and that is where Paul sees her. Paul visits Cole during office hours and inquires about Abby. Cole tells him that, “You can’t buy

my daughter with twenty horses, Paul. If Abby doesn't want to see you, or even talk to you, she has her own reasons. I won't discuss it, with her or with you" (194). Paul's obsession with Abby serves as a clue that he might also be targeting other young women on the campus and this is confirmed later in the novel. Abby becomes interested in Alex, and after they share an intimate moment at Alex's house, they want to return to Cole's place; when Alex's car won't start, they decide to hitch a ride, despite the danger involved in doing so. Indeed, Paul picks up the hitchhikers and immediately "had the gun pointed at Alex before either of them was aware of his movement" (218). When Paul takes them to the edge of a dense forest and demands they go forward, he informs Alex and Abby, "I'll tell you what no one else knows. I buried their heads in my backyard, facing my bedroom. Every night I talk to them," a confession that confirms that Paul is the killer (220). However, before Paul can hurt Alex or Abby, "The quiet *pok* of a pistol seemed unrelated to the spectacle of the huge body becoming disjointed" (221, italics original). Robert Malin has come to their rescue by killing Paul. The authorities dig up the heads near Paul's home, confirming that he is the Santa Cruz killer.

However, Paul is not the only murderer wreaking havoc on the Santa Cruz area. Another suspicious character that exists in the text is Cole's teaching assistant, Robert Malin, who seems innocent, since he killed Paul. When Robert is first introduced, he is characterized as a very attractive individual: Cole observed "the turning heads when Robert passed out papers in class, had felt with slight jealousy the mass quickening of pulses that followed the TA's movements in the big lecture hall" (16). Furthermore, Robert is described as "an exception on the campus, a serious student who seemed to approach learning with a kind of reverence" (16). Similar to Paul, Robert is depicted as somewhat creepy, especially in relation to Abby. Robert is constantly going on walks along a series of interconnected trails, one of which goes right by Cole's home. One

day, when Robert is out on a walk, he encounters Abby fishing by herself; after asking Abby on a date, Robert says to her, “Be careful going home. I admire a woman who can be in the woods alone like you, especially after everything that’s been happening. Many women would be frightened” (104).

One night when Abby is with Alex, and when Cole, Luther, and Onatima are at home, the telephone rings. The Santa Cruz police inform Cole that “They matched the bullet that killed Paul Kantner with bullets from several of the other murders” (229). With this clue, Onatima knows that “Robert killed those people” (229). Abby and Alex are on their way to Cole’s when they get into an accident; they see a painted figure, someone dressed up as the Gambler from Cole’s dreams. The figure shoots Alex and grabs Abby and drags her into the forest. Abby recognizes that the painted figure is Robert. Just before Robert attempts to rape Abby, she manages to get his gun and shoot him, and succeeds at killing him. At this point, Cole has figured out that Robert is the killer and has found his way to where his daughter and Robert are. After hearing the shots, and seeing the painted figure of Robert on the ground, Cole notices a second figure “step into the ring of light on the far edge of the clearing” (240). This figure approaches Abby and begins to dance. The figure holds his hands out to Abby and when one of his hands opened, “Cole saw the painted bone” (241). Cole shouts at Abby and speaks the gambler’s name “Venancio Asisara,” despite the fact that Luther had specifically told him not to (241). At this point, “A smile spread across the gambler’s face. . . . For a long moment, he looked at Cole, and then he turned and walked slowly toward the trees” (241). This signifies what Cole has been seeing in his dreams; with the departure of the Gambler from this scene—both in terms of the death of Robert and the other Gambler walking away—Cole can move forward with his life. This scene is also significant because it parallels the scene in which Hoey

and Luther set the kidnappers free; they save the woman, but do not attempt to destroy or eradicate evil, or in other words, they do not kill the kidnappers. In the case of the Gambler, Cole is doing a very similar thing: he has rescued his daughter and while he has not eradicated the existence of the gambler—because that is impossible—he has attempted to restore balance between good and evil in the world.

The two murderers of *Bone Game* are brought to justice because they are both killed. In addition, like Owens's allusion to true historical events with the inclusion of Father Quintana and Venancio Asisara, the Santa Cruz serial killings actually happened. Between the 1960s-1980s, there were multiple serial killers in the Santa Cruz area, most notably, John Linley Frazier, Herbert Mullin, Edmund Kemper, and David Carpenter (Yamanaka). In 1973, the District Attorney Peter Chang made a comment about Santa Cruz being "Murderville, USA," after the discovery of four bodies in a state park (Yamanaka). In *Bone Game*, Owens uses these real-life horror stories to highlight the history of violence inscribed on the land in the Santa Cruz area. In doing so, "Although both Paul and Robert are killed at the end, the novel's main subtexts, and, in a sense, Owens's main concern—the process of colonization of the native people and the search for Indian identity—do not have an identifiable, easy solution" (Idini 308). At the same time, this kind of ending more neatly falls in line with the resolution of typical mystery, crime, and detective fiction because the identities of the murderers are uncovered and they are subsequently brought to justice via death. In this way, *Bone Game* ends more conclusively than *The Sharpest Sight*, but both books pose overarching questions regarding identity and colonization. Furthermore, the ending of *Bone Game* mirrors the ending of *The Sharpest Sight* since Cole returns to Albuquerque with his daughter—not the ancestral homeland of the Choctaw—but a place he calls home and where he can be with Abby, a member of the next generation.

Certainly, *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* have a lot in common in terms of aspects of mystery crime, and detective fiction—most specifically in terms of the opening, the detectives, the forms of reasoning, and the resolution—but there is an additional layer to consider in terms of Owens himself. In regard to the mystery and detective genre, “Frequently a glance at the author’s biography confirms the source of the milieu. It may reflect his or her career, background, or technical expertise” (Herbert 403). This rings particularly true for the biographical information about Louis Owens and the character Cole McCurtain. For one thing, “As did Louis himself, Cole McCurtain identifies himself as a mixed-blood, ‘Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish-Cajun, Mississippi and Oklahoma by way of New Mexico and California’” (Haladay 56). But the similarities don’t end there, because like Cole in *Bone Game*, Owens became a professor of literature in California, and similar to Cole’s interest in fishing, Owens “had been a fly-fisherman” (“Finding Gene”). Finally, the additional mysteries that Owens layers on top of the traditional whodunit puzzles closely mirror his own life experiences. For example, Owens explicitly states that his brother Gene’s disappearance inspired *The Sharpest Sight*, which was written “out of the paradox of his non-return from that war” (“Finding Gene”). In regard to *The Sharpest Sight*, Owens also states that “It was a book about Mississippi, about my father’s Choctaw ancestors, about the mysteries of identity and story, but most of all it was a book about a lost brother and a long pattern of loss into which that one seemed to fit” (“Finding Gene”). Furthermore, one can speculate that Owens’s suicide in 2002 may have related to his own negotiation of his mixed-blood identity, very similar to Cole’s search for understanding who he is in both *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*.

In *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*, Louis Owens achieves so much more than straightforward murder-mystery stories. In both books, Owens layers a conventional murder-

mystery plot—the “simple plot”— with mysteries that explore a complex network of historical events—the “complex plot”—such as how crimes of the past, like colonization, affect present-day conceptions of identity. Such questions are inextricably related to Native American stories and experiences, and work to personify some of the typical characteristics that make up Native American mystery, crime, and detective stories. Since mystery and detective fiction often works to illuminate questions of social justice, Owens’s novels convey the importance of understanding the past and personal identity and how using cultural knowledge allows one to forge existence and resilience in the contemporary world, as Cole and his family members and friends are able to do in both *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*.

IV. THE NOVELS OF TONY HILLERMAN AND THE FILMS OF CHRIS EYRE:  
EXAMINING *SKINWALKERS* AND *A THIEF OF TIME*

One of the first writers to introduce the Native American detective to broad audiences was Tony Hillerman, which is why he is included in this study, despite the fact that he is non-Native. *The Blessing Way*, the first text in Hillerman's Leaphorn and Chee series, was published in 1970 and was followed up by seventeen more novels—all of which feature Navajo Tribal Policemen as detectives. Hugely popular among readers, admired by fellow writers, and respected by critics, Hillerman was a prolific author, and the series only ended because of his death in 2008.<sup>9</sup> The popularity of the books led to film adaptations, and in the early 2000s, three of Hillerman's texts—*Skinwalkers* (1986), *Coyote Waits* (1990), and *A Thief of Time* (1988)—were made into TV movies as part of PBS's *Mystery!* series. Chris Eyre (Arapaho/Cheyenne), who directed *Smoke Signals* (1998) and *Skins* (2002), was picked to direct *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time*.<sup>10</sup> Because Eyre is Native American himself, the film adaptations are important to examine within the context of the source texts in order to analyze how Eyre transitions Hillerman's mystery stories—which are replete with Navajo cultural content—from the page to the screen.

Eyre's adaptations of Hillerman's texts present an interesting dynamic, since the source texts were penned by a non-Native writer and then adapted for TV by a Native American

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<sup>9</sup> After Hillerman's death, Anne Hillerman, his daughter, continued the series and in 2013 *Spider Woman's Daughter* was published, and in addition to Leaphorn and Chee, Anne's iteration also features Jim Chee's wife, Officer Bernadette Manuelito, as a detective. The second book by Anne, *Rock With Wings*, was published in 2015, and her third book, *Song of the Lion*, is set to come out in April 2017.

<sup>10</sup> *Coyote Waits* was directed by Jan Egleson.

director. In her article, “*Winter in the Blood: A Case for Maintaining Cultural Content in Adaptations of Indigenous Stories*,” Amy S. Fatzinger writes,

In many visual adaptations of texts by Indigenous authors, some of what the filmmakers have ‘done with’ the story has involved diminishing the content that ties the story to a specific Native culture and thereby universalizing the film’s themes, undoubtedly to make the film accessible to a broader viewing audience, but with negative implications for Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewers. (1)

The dynamics being explored in this chapter analyze what Fatzinger mentions—but in reverse—since this chapter revolves around an Indigenous filmmaker adapting a non-Indigenous author’s work; however, the added layer here is that the non-Indigenous-authored source text is full of tribally-specific content. So the question to explore here revolves around the information embedded in Hillerman—the source texts—and what Eyre “does with” that information in his film adaptations, and whether cultural content has been diminished in order to reach a wide viewing audience.

An important aspect to take into consideration when looking at adaptations concerns the audience. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon makes a distinction between knowing and unknowing audiences. She explains that the “knowing audience” is familiar with the original source text, and thus has a frame of reference, or knowledge, when experiencing the adaptation (121). The “unknowing audience,” on the other hand, is not familiar with the source text, and experiences the adaptation as they would any other work (120). The two audiences thus, understandably, have different expectations when experiencing an adaptation, but Hutcheon emphasizes that “For an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for *both* knowing and unknowing audiences” (121, emphasis mine). The added layer to take into

consideration with both Hillerman's and Eyre's texts relates to audiences that are either familiar or unfamiliar with Native American histories and cultures. In his book *Other Destinies*, Louis Owens delineates the three audiences that Native American writers are tasked to appeal to: 1) readers of the same tribal affiliation, 2) readers who represent the pan-Indian population, who may not be familiar with the specific cultural elements embedded in the work, but who may understand other overarching themes, and 3) readers who are non-Indian and have no frame of reference for the embedded cultural information (14). Because there are multiple levels of knowing and unknowing audiences involved in the analysis of Eyre's adaptations of Hillerman's texts, this chapter considers the source texts, including some of the embedded cultural aspects, as well as the adaptations and Eyre's treatment of cultural content.

The mass appeal of the Leaphorn and Chee series paved the way for film adaptations. Robert Redford purchased the rights to *Skinwalkers* in 1986, shortly after its publication (McDaniel). However, Redford did not want to make the film with just any director, because he wanted to ensure that the project "would not only feature American Indian actors, but also American Indians directing and working the cameras" (McDaniel). This desire came from the issues that occurred during the attempted adaptation of Hillerman's fifth book in the Leaphorn and Chee series, *The Dark Wind* (1982). Filmed in 1990, the adaptation of *The Dark Wind* was produced by Robert Redford's company, Wildwood Enterprises, and was intended to be the first in a series of films derived from the Hillerman mysteries (Pristin). However, the film seemed doomed from the start. Casting Lou Diamond Phillips, who is part Cherokee, as Officer Chee garnered backlash from American Indian groups because they wanted to see a "full-blooded American Indian in the lead role" (Pristin). Furthermore, the screenplay had to be revised multiple times because the Hopi had concerns about the depictions of sacred rituals in the film,

and conflicts regarding the portrayal of Hopi spirituality emerged during filming (Pristin). Finally, the director Errol Morris, while revered for his documentaries (such as *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) and *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (2003)) had not only never directed a feature length fictional film, but his lack of knowledge and experience with Native American peoples and cultures also prevented the film from achieving its full potential (Pristin). Due to these issues, the film did not turn out as anticipated and only had a limited release in the United Kingdom, all of which provided a difficult start for the intended series of adaptations. According to Redford, *The Dark Wind* “wasn't any good and wasn't released” and that it “was a false start . . . It was miscast. It was ill-conceived and I didn't think it was the right beginning for the series. It wasn't distributed” (King). Additionally, Hillerman “expressed his disapproval of the cinematic adaptation of *The Dark Wind* after its release” (De Ruiter 152). This misstep put additional adaptations of Hillerman’s work on hold for several years.

In order to prevent some of the issues that occurred with *The Dark Wind* adaptation, Redford decided to work with Chris Eyre for the next adaptation, and Eyre became involved with the project in 2001 (King). Eyre had developed *Smoke Signals* at the Sundance Institute—part of Redford’s Sundance Film Festival—which is how the two knew one another (King). About the Hillerman adaptation, Eyre said,

The thing that Bob said to me, and really I meditated on quite a bit, is that he was interested in the books from the beginning because they weren't about anything but Indian characters in a contemporary setting and an interesting story. I think that's its biggest value. I was interested in doing a movie that was purely entertaining, and it was PBS and we were trying to reach a broad American audience. (King)

As Eyre notes, one of the biggest appeals of Hillerman's work is the fact that Hillerman writes an entertaining story that appeals to a broad audience; in doing so, Hillerman portrays a diversity of contemporary Navajos—an important way to convey the fact that Native Americans are still here and face particular issues in their communities. Pat Mitchell, the president of PBS, stated her belief in the importance of the adaptations by commenting that the “commercial guys won't take a chance on something they don't see as mainstream. We saw *Skinwalkers* as a great way to modernize our *Mystery!* series and reach a broader audience” (De Ruiter 152). In fact, *Skinwalkers* was the first American work in the 22-year history of the show. The result was successful because *Skinwalkers* was the highest-rated program on PBS in 2002, with an audience of approximately 12 million viewers (Shively).

In regard to the adaptations, Hillerman expressed concern: “Aside from the difficulties that could arise from depicting Navajo spirituality on celluloid, Hillerman was also initially skeptical about the feasibility of adapting one of his novels into a television adaptation” (De Ruiter 153). Hillerman asked, “[h]ow the hell are they going to get a television audience to understand the Navajo cultural stuff without making it a seven-hour movie or without doing any serious damage to my notions?” (De Ruiter 153). Hillerman's concerns were valid, particularly when thinking about the issues with *The Dark Wind* as well as in terms of adaptations in general; as Hutcheon notes, audiences “experience adaptations across media differently than we do adaptations within the same medium,” so Hillerman's doubts about Eyre's ability to include Navajo cultural content were justified (139). Ultimately, though, “Hillerman appreciated the manner in which Eyre depicted the Navajo ‘cultural stuff’ on screen as he was able to construct a film that created a positive portrayal of Navajo identity” (De Ruiter 153). Part of what made the adaptations of *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* so successful was the fact that a Native American

director—someone who had an understanding of the content and the need to present it respectfully—was at the helm of the movie.

Hillerman's concerns about the adaptations were also warranted because he embeds many aspects of Navajo culture in his texts, and the inclusion of Navajo cultural elements is part of what sets his work apart. One feature that plays an especially important role in Hillerman's work is the ever-present character of the setting. As Schneider writes, "setting assumes an active role in the novels, determining the nature of and the circumstances surrounding the crime, shaping and controlling the detection process itself, and dictating the terms of the resolution" (152). Because most mystery, crime, and detective stories take place within urban centers, Hillerman's move to the Navajo Nation creates a unique set of issues that are part and parcel not only to Indian Country, but specific to the Navajo Nation.

In fact, place plays such a role in the Leaphorn and Chee series that there exists a comprehensive guide to all of the places mentioned in Hillerman's series: Laurance D. Linford's book *Tony Hillerman's Navajoland: Hideouts, Haunts, and Havens in the Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee Mysteries*. Linford, former archeologist for the Navajo Nation and Executive Director of the Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Association, published his book *Navajo Places: History, Legend, Landscape* in 2000 and later collaborated with Hillerman on the second text. Linford writes, "The goal of this book is to present the reader with verbal portraits of the haunts and hideouts that serve as backdrop to Hillerman's yarns. Elaborations on the necessarily brief snapshots Tony serves up in the stories are embellished with notes on history and Navajo cultural significance attributed to the places" (xv). The very existence of such a text proves the importance of place, both in terms of Hillerman's work, as well as in terms of the Navajo worldview.

The consideration of place provides a nice segue to what Holm et al. call the Peoplehood Matrix, a lens for analyzing Native American literature which consists of the interconnected aspects of land, language, ceremony, and sacred history. All components of the Peoplehood Matrix are present in Hillerman's work, although sometimes some of these characteristics are contested. For example, in a review published by *Studies in American Indian Literature*, Barre Toelken observes that Hillerman is not consistent in his presentation of Navajo orthography: for example, it's noted that Hillerman "uses *hozro* instead of *hozho* (beauty, stability, harmony), *yataalii* instead of *hataalii* (singer, 'medicine man'), *belagana* for *bilagaana* (American, white person)" (20, italics original). Interestingly, though, Hillerman took notice of these comments and made the corrective changes to later books and editions: "either Tony Hillerman subscribes to SAIL, or his copy editor does, for in his latest work, *Coyote Waits* . . . he has cleaned up his orthographic act. *Hozho*, *hataalii*, and *bilagaana* all appear in their proper Young & Morgan orthographic clothes" ("Hillerman Again" 20). The fact that a reviewer took notice of Hillerman's use of the Navajo language, and the fact that Hillerman subsequently corrected his presentation of Navajo language not only conveys the inclusion and importance of the Navajo language in the Leaphorn and Chee series, but also that Hillerman is open to making changes in order to present more accurate depictions of Navajo culture and life.

With place and language established as two of the four aspects of the Peoplehood Matrix, ceremony, a third aspect, also plays a fairly consistent role in the Leaphorn and Chee series, since Officer Chee is an aspiring medicine man, or *hataalii*. In *Skinwalkers*, Officer Chee receives a request to perform a Blessing Way ceremony from an individual named Alice Yazzie. Officer Chee notes that Yazzie's signature included, "in the custom of old-fashioned Navajos, her clan. Streams Come Together Dinee. Chee was born to the Slow Talking People, and for the

Salt Clan. No connections with the Streams Clan. Thus her invitation was the first clue that Jim Chee was becoming accepted as a singer outside his own kinfolk” (144). However, in this particular example, Chee never performs the ceremony, because the request is a ruse to get him to a certain location in order to ambush him. An added layer to the allusion of the Blessing Way ceremony is further complicated by the “Author’s Note” that Hillerman includes prior to the start of the story: he writes that he is aware of the fact that “more traditional shamans would disapprove of both the way Jim Chee was invited to do the Blessing Way mentioned in the book (such arrangements should be made face-to-face and not by letter) and of Chee practicing a sandpainting on the ground under the sky. Such sacred and powerful ritual should be done only in the hogan” (*Skinwalkers*). This provides an interesting dichotomy, since it clearly shows that Hillerman is aware of the traditional protocol of ceremony and ritual in the Navajo worldview, and yet, he still chooses to present it in inaccurate ways. However, perhaps the use of the letter to request the ceremony should have been a clue to Chee, not about his success as a singer, but about the fact that the request is a setup. Either way, even though Hillerman presents some inaccurate information, he is careful not to present the ceremony in the text; in this way, Hillerman respects the sacredness of such acts and leaves the details out of the narrative, effectively refusing to exploit Navajo culture and spiritual practices.

The fourth component of the Peoplehood Matrix is sacred history; this component “consists of information imparted in the vernacular about a group’s origins, proper behavior and the ways in which to maintain group cohesion through ritual and ceremonial performance as well as when and how ceremonies should be performed, and how the group fits into their particular environment” (Stratton and Washburn 61). In the first chapter of *Skinwalkers*, after an unknown shooter attempts to kill Chee, a thunderstorm rolls in, replete with lightning: “through the holes

punched in the paper-thin aluminum walls, he could see lightning briefly illuminate the dying thunderhead on the northwest horizon. In Navajo mythology, lightning symbolized the wrath of the *yei*, the Holy People venting their malice against the earth” (10). While the use of the term “mythology” is problematic, in that it suggests that the Navajo belief system is false, Hillerman makes a point to include aspects of the belief system in order to convey Navajo cosmology.

Another example occurs later in the book where cosmology is inextricably linked with weather once again: Leaphorn is watching a dust storm moving down the valley and he thinks to himself, “It was the sort of thing Emma would have noticed, and found beauty in, and related in some way or other to the mythology of The People. Emma would have said something about the Blue Flint Boys playing their games. They were *yei* personalities credited with stirring up whirlwinds” (125). Again, this example acknowledges Navajo cosmology, but does not take the time to explain it in detail, granting privilege to Navajo readers. Later in the novel, Chee is practicing dry painting the images used in ceremonies: “He was finishing the picture of Sun’s Creation, an episode from the origin story used in the second night of the Blessing Way” (219). Once again, this information is not further contextualized and readers unfamiliar with Navajo cosmology simply understand that this is a sacred act that is related to the Navajo origin story. As these three examples show, and certainly they are not the only examples of sacred history in the text, Hillerman is careful to invoke the Navajo origin story, but to not explicitly re-tell it. Hillerman makes the existence of the Navajo worldview clear, but does not simply insert it as a form of literary tourism; instead it grounds Leaphorn and Chee within their particular cultural context and beliefs, and makes the location and protocols of this land and culture prevalent (*Shaman or Sherlock* 38).

The examples listed above are in no way representative of all of the inclusions of land, language, ceremony, and sacred history in *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time*; in fact, much as there is an entire text dedicated to the places in the Leaphorn and Chee series, a similar book could be written considering the role of the Peoplehood Matrix in Hillerman's detective stories. Even though Hillerman is neither Navajo, nor Native American, he recognizes how land, language, ceremony, and sacred history interconnect to make up the worldview of the Navajo. In a review published in *SAIL*, Toelken states that Hillerman

provides a surprisingly accurate depiction of current Navajo life and worldview, the details of which become central to the mystery. Thus, the reader must pick up some ethnographic signals and a sense of Native logic in order to understand the story and to appreciate its resolution—a requirement which might easily deter or bore the inattentive or superficial reader of popular fiction. (31)

As Toelken points out, the Navajo cultural elements embedded in the novels directly work with the conventional elements of mystery, crime, and detective fiction. Furthermore, while not all members of the Navajo Nation agreed with this choice, Hillerman was awarded the Special Friend of Dineh Award from the Navajo Tribal Council in 1991, indicating the Nation's appreciation of his work (Haynes).<sup>11</sup>

With some context about Hillerman and Eyre, and the about the source texts and the adaptations, the first book and film pairing to examine is *Skinwalkers*. Hillerman's *Skinwalkers*

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, according to Hillerman, "The best review I ever received was from a Navajo librarian with whom I was discussing the work of Indian novelists," like Silko, Welch, and Momaday. The librarian said that "We read them and their books are beautiful. . . . We say, yes this is us. . . . But it leaves us sad, with no hope. We read of Jim Chee, and Joe Leaphorn . . . and again we say, 'Yes, this is us. But now we win.' Like the stories our grandmothers used to tell us, they make us feel good about being Navajos" (qtd. in Freese 108-09).

(1986) is the seventh book in the series, but actually the first book to include both Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee. The novel won two awards: the 1988 Anthony Award for Best Novel and the 1987 Spur Award for Best Western Novel. *Skinwalkers* opens with an inexplicable attack on Officer Jim Chee. After waking up in the middle of the night, Chee is able to avoid a series of shotgun blasts fired into his trailer by an unknown shooter. When Leaphorn learns of the attack on Chee, this crime is added to a list of three unsolved homicides that Leaphorn is working on. That same day, Bahe Yellowhorse, the founder and chief of medical staff at Badwater Clinic, comes to see Leaphorn and inquire about the investigation of one of the murders and to complain about Officer Chee; Yellowhorse, who combines Western medicine and traditional Navajo healing to treat patients, proclaims that Chee is telling people that Yellowhorse is a fake medicine man. Leaphorn looks into Chee, but instead of questioning him about Yellowhorse's claim, Leaphorn asks him to assist in the investigation of the homicides and Chee agrees. The two then use their own individual reasoning skills to uncover the culprit(s) behind the murders of Irma Onesalt, Dugai Endocheeney, and Wilson Sam—homicides that initially seem unrelated. In their journey toward discovering the criminal, Leaphorn and Chee are taken through twists and turns that involve Navajo witches, more murder, and greed.

In terms of the TV movie version of *Skinwalkers* (2002), the film's story only loosely resembles the plot of the book. James Redford, Robert Redford's son, wrote the teleplay and acknowledged the difficulty in adapting the story and its need for multiple revisions, and, as a result, the plot changed dramatically (King). The impetus for Leaphorn and Chee's investigation revolves around the mysterious murder of medicine man Roman George, where a partially completed pictograph was left at the scene of the crime. Chee interprets the sign as a clue, since he is an aspiring medicine man, and is currently training under his mentor Wilson Sam. Chee

also observes that the arrow used to kill Roman contains a piece of human bone, a sign that a skinwalker is at work. While Chee reads these clues, Leaphorn has little patience for Chee's interest in Navajo spiritual practice. When more medicine men turn up murdered, Leaphorn and Chee make connections between the seemingly unrelated murders, leading them to discover the culprit.

The changes made for the movie adaptation are numerous, and not only relate to plot, but also to general details of the book, and such changes effect the overall message Eyre embeds in the movie. In Hillerman's text, the themes of healing and medicine exist, but Eyre's adaptation takes those themes a step further, as a way to underscore the importance of medicine, healing, and cultural practices and how those concepts function differently in Western and Navajo cultures. For example, in regard to plot, while the victims in the book version seem to be randomly targeted individuals, the victims in the film version are all medicine men—individuals who are practitioners of Navajo healing. In terms of miscellaneous details, in the book, Leaphorn's wife Emma suffers from a brain tumor, while in the movie, she has cancer. Though a small detail, the change in Emma's prognosis underscores the theme of healing, as well as serves a practical purpose. In the book, the couple does not know what is plaguing Emma, but in the movie, the couple knows that Emma has cancer, which is what fuels the couple to move from Phoenix to the reservation, since Emma wants to be within the four sacred mountains, in Dinétah, during her sickness. Meanwhile, in Hillerman's iteration, Joe and Emma have lived on the reservation for a long time. While some of these changes seem minute, these specific details work together to foreground Indigenous worldviews about healing, such as, for example, making an explicit connection between wellness and place/land; as a result, Eyre does not necessarily increase tribally-specific cultural content, but he does increase the focus on Indigenous

perspectives, which presents a critical change that works to inform viewers about non-Western worldviews, particularly in relation to ways of healing. Some of the specific ways in which Eyre expresses this message relates to changes made to the opening, the forms of reasoning, and the resolution.

As previously mentioned, the book version of *Skinwalkers* opens with a mysterious attack on Chee. He is awakened in the middle of the night by a cat he is taking care of; he observes that something “was not ten feet from the window under which Chee slept, an indistinct black-against-black. But the shape was upright. Human” (8). All of a sudden, “Light and sound struck simultaneously—a white-yellow flash which burned itself onto the retina behind the lens of Chee’s eyes and a boom which slammed into his eardrums and repeated itself. Again. And again” (9). Once the sounds and shots stop, Chee examines the holes that the shots have left in the side of his trailer, and he decides that it was a shotgun. With this opening, Hillerman adheres to the tradition of the genre by presenting a puzzle in the opening of the book. Who is shooting at Chee? And why do they want to kill Chee? This riddle drives the narrative of the book.

The film version of *Skinwalkers*, on the other hand, opens with a completely different scene. Beginning with panoramic shots of what is presumably the Navajo Nation, the film portrays an elder Navajo man driving as the sun sets. When an animal runs in front of his car, the man gets out to investigate it. As he is checking the load in his truck, an arrow suddenly strikes his hand, pinning it to the back of the truck. The man is able to rip the arrow out of his hand and get back into his vehicle, but as he is about to drive away, the passenger side window shatters and the scene cuts to black. This opening varies greatly from the novel, but at the same time, the film’s opening falls in line with the conventions of the genre, because an initial puzzle is presented: who is the elderly Native man? Who attacked him? And why was he attacked?

Leaphorn and Chee meet at the scene of the crime and it is then revealed that the victim—who has been murdered—is Roman George, a medicine man. Since the film opens with the mysterious murder of a traditional healer, Eyre makes it clear that his adaptation foregrounds the differences, similarities, and potential conflicts that can arise from Western and Native conceptions of healing.

With very different crimes driving the opening of the narratives, the depictions of Leaphorn and Chee, as well as the methodologies they employ in solving the crimes, are also important to analyze. Since Leaphorn and Chee are both Navajo and are operating within the Navajo Nation, these factors have a bearing on the forms of reasoning they utilize, particularly in regard to culturally-specific protocol. Schneider notes that Hillerman's "detective heroes are nonetheless descendants of the Great Detective. Accordingly, in the Hillerman canon, the crimes function as intellectual puzzles designed to challenge the detectives' ratiocinative skills" (Schneider 154). Because Leaphorn and Chee are members of law enforcement, most of their investigative methods conform to traditional police procedurals, but because Leaphorn and Chee are Navajo, and working within the Navajo Nation, "the two policemen must honor the customs of their people if they are to make any headway in their search for the killers" (Schneider 156). For example, when talking with Navajo individuals about different aspects of the crimes, "The questioning itself must be handled properly, for Leaphorn and Chee are dealing with a people given to taciturnity and innately suspiciously of strangers" (Schneider 156). In other words, Leaphorn and Chee are aware of Navajo cultural conventions, and that the EuroWestern forms of policing don't always correspond with the Navajo worldview. As a result, Leaphorn and Chee must proceed with their investigations in ways that uphold Navajo cultural protocols. One specific example of this occurs in the book *Skinwalkers* when Leaphorn or Chee, or both of them

together, arrive at someone's hogan: it is polite to wait outside until the residents notice they have a visitor. Chee recalls his mother teaching him this lesson: "'You don't just go run up to somebody's hogan,' his mother had taught him. 'You might see something you don't want to see'" (80). So, in this scene, "Chee sat, without giving it a thought, to allow the residents of Badwater Wash to get in harmony with the idea of a visit from a tribal policeman to button up and tidy up or do whatever was required by Navajo good manners" (80).

The cultural context not only plays a role in how Leaphorn and Chee interact with people, but it also affects how they interpret the clues they uncover. Schneider writes that "Only in terms of the two detectives' intimate knowledge of their people's customs and myths do the clues necessary to solving the crimes take on significance—a significance that would be lost on a non-Indian" (157). One specific example of this comes from the clue of the bone bead in Hillerman's *Skinwalkers*. Chee explains that "Witches blowing a little piece of bone into somebody to give 'em the corpse sickness" (97). Later, Chee finds a bone bead in a key suspect's wallet: "The bead seemed to be made of bone. In fact, it looked like the one he'd found on the floor of his trailer" (123). Outside of a Navajo context, these clues would not hold the same significance; as a result, this tribally-specific piece of information plays an important role in Leaphorn and Chee's investigation. Eyre also includes information about bones and their relationship to skinwalkers; when Leaphorn and Chee are examining Roman George's truck, Leaphorn points to the arrow still lodged in the back of George's vehicle. Leaphorn asks where someone would find an arrow like that, and Chee responds, "You wouldn't, it's made of bone. And if it's made by a skinwalker, I'd say that's human bone" (*Skinwalkers*). Leaphorn's lack of knowledge allows for Chee to briefly explain such a phenomena, and while Eyre does not necessarily increase cultural content, the juxtaposition between Chee's knowledge and

Leaphorn's skepticism allows for such concepts to be more easily explained to unknowing viewers.

In the film adaptations, the majority of the characteristics that define Leaphorn and Chee, as well as the dynamic of their relationship remains. However, a few key aspects have been changed. One of the most notable differences is Leaphorn's background and his appreciation and understanding of Navajo culture. In the film version of *Skinwalkers*, Leaphorn has just moved to the reservation from Phoenix; while it's unclear if he's lived on the reservation before, what is clear is that his knowledge of Navajo culture has been stifled by his urban life. Screenwriter James Redford explains that the choice to make Leaphorn more urban and contemporary in the film was purposeful. Redford states,

In the book, he is more of a traditionalist in the sense that he has definitely grown up on the reservation and he is very aware of his past and his traditions, yet he's always been a little bit more of an empiricist and a rationalist than say Jim Chee would be. But in the movie, that's drawn up in a more of a stark contrast to dramatically contrast them as characters. (*Skinwalkers*)

This choice alters the characteristics Hillerman uses to sketch Leaphorn's personality, but the changes allow the filmmakers to not only show a diversity of Navajo individuals, but it also serves as a function to more easily share cultural information with viewers.

One example of Leaphorn's character change in the film is shown when he is on his computer and researching, perhaps Googling, "skinwalkers." This detail seems extremely puzzling, since in the novels, while Leaphorn sometimes struggles with his belief in witches, it is clear that he knows and understands what they are. In the movie, he pulls up a website with the title "Skinwalkers, Witches, and Navajo Folklore" and reads it intensely. The camera then zooms

in on a figure on the webpage, which is, incidentally, the same figure that has been drawn next to the murdered bodies. In the films “Leaphorn’s ignorance of Navajo culture allows for some information about Diné customs to be included in the dialogues. . . . Chee’s knowledge contributes to helping clarify mysterious signs connected with the crimes they investigate” (Feier 56). The decision to make the filmic version of Leaphorn less knowledgeable about Navajo culture than his literary counterpart provides the viewer with the opportunity to learn about Navajo culture—something that would be difficult if Leaphorn was portrayed as he is in the texts. Initially, Hillerman was apprehensive about this alteration to Leaphorn’s character profile, but he came to accept it since such a change could help viewers understand some of the cultural context embedded in the films. For example, Hillerman reasoned that “[b]y portraying Leaphorn as a Navajo who had never been on a reservation, it made sense that he would grill Chee about Navajo beliefs. This way, viewers can understand the culture, too, without having to sit through a four-hour movie” (qtd. in De Ruiter 154).

In terms of the resolution of *Skinwalkers*, it’s important to point out that Hillerman’s canon evades some of the typical aspects of a mystery’s conclusion. Freese notes that,

The final scene in which the investigator reveals how he has solved his case and then proudly unravels the puzzle is both inadequate and superfluous because such showing off would not only be an offence against the very order that needs to be protected but also would shift the accent from the active restitution of the disturbed harmony of *hozho* to a vain display of an individual’s intellectual strength. (Freese 127, italics original)

Hillerman’s alteration of the typical mystery novel ending conforms to the communal aspect of Navajo life, and upholds the cultural context of the novels. Ray Austin describes *hozho* as “the foundational backbone of Navajo philosophy” and that “the concept pervades everything in the

traditional and contemporary Navajo universe” (53). Austin elaborates that while anthropologists have glossed *hozho* to mean “harmony, balance, beauty, goodness, blessed, pleasant, perfection, [and] ideal,” such one word descriptions “fall within the realm of the *hozho* concept, but they do not tell the whole story” (53). Rather, Austin explains that *hozho* “encompasses everything that Navajos consider positive and good; positive characteristics that Navajos believe contribute to living life to the fullest” (54). Hillerman’s endings deviate from the traditional resolution of the mystery, crime, and detective novel because he attempts to create endings that work within the framework of upholding *hozho*. Schneider also notes how Hillerman’s conclusions deviate from the traditional resolution: “Despite sharing many of the characteristics of the classical detective story, the Hillerman novels omit the traditional final scene of recapitulation and explanation in which the detective here reveals—usually to an admiring audience—the hows and whys of the case he has just solved” (159).

In the book version of *Skinwalkers*, the resolution is irrevocably tied up with the opening of the novel. Chee gets a request to perform a Blessing Way ceremony; however, when he arrives at the location, it becomes clear that the invitation was a set-up. Chee is subsequently shot by a young mother who had been told by Dr. Yellowhorse that Chee is a skinwalker and that it was Chee who ensured her son would die. After Leaphorn comes to Chee’s rescue, the plot reveals that Dr. Yellowhorse has been illegally claiming reimbursements months after patients died or were cured. Leaphorn deduces that Irma Onesalt had to be killed since she discovered the scam Yellowhorse was running and that Dugai Endocheeney and Wilson Sam also had to be killed since they too had become aware of the doctor’s crimes. Chee is taken to Yellowhorse’s clinic for treatment after being shot by the young mother, and Yellowhorse both confesses to the crimes and threatens Chee’s life. The grieving mother then arrives with her shotgun and kills

Yellowhorse, just as Leaphorn arrives at the clinic. After shooting Yellowhorse, she tells Leaphorn, “The skinwalker is dead . . . This time I killed him” (277). When another doctor confirms that Yellowhorse is indeed dead, the woman says, “Then I want to bring in my baby. I have him in my truck. Maybe now he is alive again” (278). Of course, this woman’s desperate actions do not bring her baby back to life but, unbeknownst to her, she has killed the person who murdered Irma Onesalt, Dugai Endocheeney, Wilson Sam, and Roosevelt Bistie.

Interestingly, Yellowhorse—unlike the other criminals examined in this study—is not non-Native, but, in fact, a Native person of mixed-blood; he was “born to the Dolii Dinee, the Blue Bird People of his mother. But he had no paternal clan. His father was Olgala Sioux” (29). Furthermore, Yellowhorse seems like a positive contributor to the community: he “was a tribal councilman representing the Badwater Chapter and a member of the Tribal Council Judiciary Committee, as well as a doctor. And who, as a doctor, was founder and chief of medical staff of the Badwater Clinic” (27). Hillerman’s decision to cast Yellowhorse as the criminal shows the diversity of Native people, and avoids some of the stereotypical ways Native people have been romanticized in literature. Making Yellowhorse the criminal further humanizes the characters of *Skinwalkers*, since it shows that no one—not even a revered Native doctor—is beyond greed or crime.

While Hillerman’s decision to cast a Native person as the criminal in *Skinwalkers* may on the surface seem to be problematic in that it appears to replicate other non-Native depictions of Native people as violent, what Hillerman is doing is actually more complex than that. In many non-Native-authored books or even in the film genre of Westerns, when the Native people were portrayed as the villains, the heroes were EuroAmericans, and the victims were usually EuroAmericans as well. Such stories only allowed Native people to be the enemy. Hillerman’s

*Skinwalkers* changes this formula up, since the forces of good, the victims, *and* the criminal are all Native people. Instead of creating a simple binary—Indians are bad, whites are good—Hillerman complicates the notion and shows that individuals, no matter their identity, are capable of fitting into the categories of hero, victim, or criminal.<sup>12</sup>

The resolution of the film *Skinwalkers* ends differently than the novel, partly driven by the changes made to the plot for the adaptation. In the film, there is no unnamed woman who believes that her child has been witched, there's no Dr. Yellowhorse, and there's no Irma Onesalt discovering Yellowhorse's scam. Instead, the criminal is Dr. Stone, a Navajo practitioner of Western medicine who had been adopted by white parents, because of the supposed death of his birth parents. In the film, Chee's mentor Wilson Sam tells the detectives

that he and three other medicine men made a tragic mistake years ago. When some people who lived near a paint factory on the reservation fell sick, Sam and his fellow healers tried to help them in the traditional manner and rejected white doctors' aid. But their methods did not work because 'it was a white man's sickness that needed white man's medicine.' (Feier 52)

As a result, Dr. Stone's hatred for Navajo medicine men "stems from their handling of the lead poisoning incident which resulted in his father's suicide and his mother's illness. He despises the medicine men for sticking to their practices and, therefore, blames them for his family's fate," and is the driving force behind Stone's decision to become a doctor of Western medicine (Feier 52). This change in the storyline is a major deviation, which works to underscore the dichotomy

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<sup>12</sup> Hillerman's prolific canon presents an interesting set of data in terms of who he casts in the roles of hero, victim, and criminal, and how he characterizes these individuals. As *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time Show*, sometimes the criminal is non-Native and sometimes the criminal is Native—unlike the other texts examined in the study, where the identified villains are *always* non-Native.

between Western and Native conceptions of healing. Rather than the unnamed woman confronting the doctor, Eyre portrays Chee doing so, which provides an interesting scene, since Chee is training to become a traditional healer, while Dr. Stone practices Western medicine and despises traditional Navajo healing practices.

When Chee confronts Dr. Stone, Stone expresses his contempt for Navajo healing practices. Stone says to Chee,

Severe tremors. Oh, someone put a curse on you. Sky-high blood pressure. Let's do a sand drawing. Double vision, slurred speech. No problem. I'll sing you a little song. . . . you and the stick wavers like you are a dying breed. Mumbo jumbo, the bogus rituals. It's all teetering on the edge of extinction. And I have to tell you, it's been a great pleasure of mine to give it a little push. (*Skinwalkers*)

As soon as Chee gets this confession, he gets his gun, and instructs Stone to come toward him; as this is happening, Chee says, "You say you're a doctor? A healer? Healer don't kill people. Navajo. Western medicine. New or old. We hold a sanctity of life" (*Skinwalkers*). Chee's comment here emphasizes the overarching goal that *all* healers possess, whether they are working within the context of Western or Navajo beliefs—their job is to heal people, not to kill them. Chee and Stone get in a physical fight, and after Stone wounds Chee with Chee's own gun, Leaphorn arrives, and saves Chee by killing Stone.

The importance of healing is further reinforced with the closing moments of the film: the final scene depicts Chee performing a healing ceremony for Emma—a ceremony he conducts on his own, since Stone killed Chee's mentor, Wilson Sam. While this type of practice may not seem to possess healing properties—particularly if looked at from a strictly Western perspective of medicine—Eyre shows, that for Emma, this ceremony is imperative to her healing process.

James Redford states that in reference to the film, “In one sense, it’s really about healing and the different attitudes and beliefs in which it works and doesn’t work between Western and traditional Navajo medicine” (*Skinwalkers*). Finally, the closing scene further reinforces Leaphorn’s remaining skepticism about Navajo cultural practices: he does not participate in the ceremony. Instead he stays back in the car and works on a crossword puzzle. After a minute though, he gets out of the car, leans against the hood, and looks out onto the landscape, which is the scene that ends the film.

Overall, both versions of *Skinwalkers* present murder-mysteries that are inherently tied to aspects of Navajo culture, such as place and cosmology. At the same time, while Eyre does not necessarily add more tribally-specific cultural content to the movie adaptation, the changes made do emphasize the idea that medicine and healing are complex practices that encompass more than going to a doctor of Western medicine, and that neither traditional Indigenous forms of healing, nor contemporary Western conceptions of medicine are without their own limitations. In juxtaposing two distinct forms of healing, Eyre does not prioritize one over the other, but rather underscores the importance of both forms of medicine, and provides important information about Indigenous practices of healing to unknowing viewers. The small changes made validate Indigenous medicine in a way that Hillerman’s text does not, such as through the example of Emma wanting to be on the Navajo Nation when she is ill—in this way, Eyre directly ties healing with land/place.

*A Thief of Time* (1988) immediately follows *Skinwalkers* and is the eighth book in the series. This novel won the 1989 Macavity Award and was nominated for the 1989 Anthony Award as well as the 1989 Edgar Award. The novel opens with Eleanor Friedman-Bernal, an anthropologist interested in Anasazi pottery, venturing into a canyon during the night to look for

pots. The story cuts to Joe Leaphorn who becomes involved in a search for the missing Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Meanwhile, Jim Chee has had a bad week because thieves have stolen digging equipment from the tribal motor pool under his watch. It soon becomes clear that the theft of the digging equipment is related to Dr. Friedman-Bernal's disappearance. As the story progresses, Leaphorn and Chee encounter a number of potential suspects, while more individuals turn up murdered. Upon connecting some of the clues, Leaphorn discovers where Friedman-Bernal is and that she remains alive; Chee comes to the same conclusion using different methods, and the two uncover the culprit behind Friedman-Bernal's attempted murder, as well as the murders of the other individuals.

Unlike the vast differences between the plots of the book and film versions of *Skinwalkers*, the movie *A Thief of Time* (2004) closely follows the plot of the book. However, in this case, while the plots remain virtually identical, there are some general details that have been changed. One of these changes relates to the character of Emma. In the book version of *A Thief of Time*, the reader learns that the surgery Emma was required to have to remove the brain tumor did not go well, and that she died as a result of the procedure. In the film adaptation, however, Emma remains alive, continuing to battle cancer. Once again, like in *Skinwalkers*, this change has an impact on Leaphorn's character profile. This influences the motivation behind Leaphorn's desire to find Friedman-Bernal; in the book, Leaphorn feels that he must find the anthropologist, largely driven by the void he feels in his life from Emma dying. In the film, though, Leaphorn's obsession with finding Friedman-Bernal is puzzling, since Emma is alive, although she is sick, but overall life seems normal for Leaphorn.

Another difference between the book and film version of *A Thief of Time* relates to the fact that some of the thematic issues are heightened in the film version. For example, "An

assessment of the differing ways in which Eyre and Hillerman constructed their respective mysteries demonstrates Eyre's desire to use *A Thief of Time* to validate the existence and power of chindi" (De Ruiter 154). In the book, *chindi* is explained by Slick Nakai, who is Navajo, but has converted to Christianity and practices as a traveling preacher. In the first scene in which he is introduced to readers, Nakai explains:

Everybody here remembers somebody dying. . . . And then there's the four days when you don't do nothing but remember. And nobody speaks the name of the dead. . . . Because there's nothing left of them but the *chindi*, that ghost that is everything that was bad about them and nothing that was good. And I don't say my mother's name anymore—not ever again—because that *chindi* may hear me calling it and come back and make me sick. (50)

Hillerman uses Nakai as a mediator, since he provides a straightforward explanation of *chindi* to readers who may be unfamiliar with the concept. The notion of death certainly plays an important role in the novel, but Eyre's adaptation incorporates some significant changes to highlight the importance of *chindi* in Navajo culture. Eyre makes specific changes to the opening and to the forms of reasoning to underscore the importance of this aspect of Navajo belief.

The opening of Hillerman's *A Thief of Time* depicts anthropologist Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal venturing into a canyon in the middle of the night, searching for pots. However, when Friedman-Bernal arrives at her spot, she discovers that she is not the first one there: when she sees bones, she knows that "Someone had been digging. Someone had been looting. A pot hunter. A Thief of Time. Someone had gotten here first" (9). After she realizes that someone had gotten to the spot before she did, she observes frogs around a small pool and notices that "They were tethered. A whitish thread—perhaps a yucca fiber—had been tied

around a back leg of each of these tiny black-green frogs and then to a twig stuck into the damp earth” (10). She knows that a human had to have tethered the frogs and she begins to panic. Suddenly, she hears a whistle, as well as the melody of “Hey, Jude” (10). Then, a humped shape comes toward her, and with that image, the chapter ends. Once again, Hillerman uses the introduction to create intrigue and mystery: Who tied up these frogs? Who was coming toward Friedman-Bernal? What happened to Friedman-Bernal? Like the attack on Chee in *Skinwalkers*, the questions surrounding Friedman-Bernal push the narrative of *A Thief of Time*.

The film version of *A Thief of Time* opens with sweeping shots of the Navajo Nation, as the sun sets and a full moon emerges. A shadow of kokopelli can be seen along the canyon walls as he dances; thunder rolls and Dr. Friedman-Bernal walks into the canyon, shining her flashlight and examining the petroglyphs. As in the novel, she comes upon the pool and the tethered frogs. Suddenly she hears the sound of a rock tumbling and then sees the ghost of an Anasazi woman, who is holding a large pot. Friedman-Bernal gets out her gun, but the ghost walks away, and the screen cuts to black. While this opening is very similar to the opening of the novel, and poses some of the same questions, the addition of the ghost is a major change, which has implications for the messages that Eyre embeds in the film. De Ruiter notes that the scene leaves audiences “to ponder who/what is the apparition and whether it played a role in the disappearance of the archaeologist” (De Ruiter 155). In addition, as this is the opening scene of the movie, Eyre’s decision to include a ghost—or a *chindi*—highlights the important role ghosts play in this movie, as well as in the Navajo worldview.

The role of *chindi* also affects how Leaphorn and Chee carry out their investigations, especially Chee. A specific scene to consider occurs when Chee decides to scout locations for where the stolen backhoe may be. After investigating multiple sites, like Canyon Largo, Blanco

Canyon, and Gobernador Canyon, Chee eventually finds the spot, just beyond Betonnie Tsosie Wash. Chee is feeling victorious when he discovers a truck and the stolen backhoe, but when he slips and falls down a ridge, he attempts to get up, only to discover “cloth under his fingers. And a button. And the hard bone and cold skin of a wrist” (61). Chee identifies the man to be Navajo, and that he “had apparently been shot twice” (61). Because Chee is an aspiring medicine man, the Navajo worldview plays an integral role in his thought process: “He thought of the Navajo’s ghost, hovering nearby. . . . The *chindi* was out there, representing all that was evil in the dead man’s being” (61). But this discovery is not the end of death in this scene: Chee acknowledges the remains of the Anasazi noting, “They were everywhere. A shoulder blade, a thigh bone, part of a skull, ribs, four or five connected vertebrae, part of a foot, a lower jaw” (61). In addition, Chee also discovers the body of Joe Nails—a non-Native man who was Chee’s initial suspect in the theft of the backhoe. Hillerman writes “Jim Chee was modern man built upon traditional Navajo. This was simply too much death. Too many ghosts disturbed. . . . He wanted only to be away from here. Into the sunlight. Into the cleansing heat of a sweat bath. To be surrounded by the healing, curing sounds of a Ghostway ceremonial” (62). Hillerman makes it clear that Chee is very disturbed by this scene, and that he feels the need to be cleansed from the overwhelming presence of death—which conveys one way in which Chee’s Navajo beliefs hinder him in the investigations of murders. In regard to this scene, De Ruiter notes that “Hillerman writes into the novel that Chee is aware of the presence of *chindi* in the area of the disturbed bones, but there is not an actual visible manifestation of a *chindi*” (De Ruiter 155).

In the movie version of this scene, Eyre takes Hillerman’s depiction a step further and chooses to depict an actual manifestation of *chindi*, just like he did with the beginning of the film: “In the television adaptation, as Chee stumbles upon the two corpses, their eyes are a milky

white shade and they have strange marks on their faces. After this discovery, Chee spots the Anasazi apparition, prompting him to have a sweat to cleanse the corpse sickness from his body” (De Ruiter 155). In the commentary for *A Thief of Time*, Eyre discusses the milky eyes, noting that this choice not only conveys that the men are dead, but that it also suggests that something else happened to them, perhaps something to do with the ghost (*A Thief of Time*). Eyre also notes that the apparition that appears in this scene is “a spirit or a ghost that’s protecting the site” (*A Thief of Time*). The apparition included in this scene appears to be the same apparition in the opening of the film: an Anasazi woman holding a pot. Unlike Friedman-Bernal, who attempted to shoot the ghost, Chee flees the scene. Interestingly, this scene conveys that both non-Native and Native individuals can see the apparition, and that one’s individual beliefs do not exclude the existence or manifestation of *chindi*.

Another important scene that shows the intersection of detective fiction elements and Indigenous beliefs, particularly in relation to *chindi*, occurs when Chee questions Amos Whistler and Slick Nakai on the location of the discovery of a particular pot. Whistler, who is Paiute, knows where the pot came from, but refuses to take Chee there. When Whistler was younger, “he had heard about the ruins years ago from an uncle, who told him to stay out of the place because the ghosts were bad in there” (144-45). But when Whistler learned about Jesus, and converted to Christianity, “he didn’t believe in ghosts, so he packed in with a couple of horses, but it was tough going. An ordeal. He’d lost a horse. A good one” (145). As a result, according to Whistler, “I don’t go there no more” (145). Whistler explains that, “I’m a Christian now. I know about Jesus. I don’t worry about Anasazi ghosts like I did when I was a pagan. Before I walked on the Jesus Road. But I won’t go into that place” because he “heard him in there . . . I heard the Watersprinkler playing his flute” (145). This scene directly juxtaposes Western and Indigenous

belief systems and Amos's response conveys that even though he has converted to Christianity, he is still affected by the power of *chindi*. However, the novel "ascribes the flute Amos heard to Brigham Houk, who was playing his flute in the canyon," which provides a less supernatural explanation for the sound than what Eyre does with this scene in the movie adaptation (De Ruiter 157).

In the film version of this scene, Eyre once again plays up the importance of *chindi*, in a way that Hillerman does not. When Amos refuses to take Chee to the spot where he found the pot, Slick urges Amos to pray to Jesus, and that Jesus will keep him safe. Amos responds passionately saying, "I pray to Jesus! It's the *chindi*! He's been here a lot longer than Jesus!" (*A Thief of Time*). Amos then refers to Chee, and says, "Ask him. He's got a charm under that shirt. He knows more about the *chindi* than you do," referencing the fact that Chee is an aspiring medicine man (*A Thief of Time*). Amos explains that he almost died when he went into that canyon and that the sound of a flute signified to him the presence of *chindi*. The alteration Eyre makes to Amos's "statement is significant since it demonstrates the power of the *chindi* is even stronger than Jesus due to its long occupancy on the land" (De Ruiter 157). Even though Amos has converted to Christianity, he still negotiates between Indigenous and Western beliefs, and his statement underscores the notion that Navajo/Indigenous belief systems supersede the power of Christianity. Furthermore, the film's ending does not ascribe the sound of the flute to Brigham, as the novel does, which suggests the existence of *chindi* is real.

Since the book version of *A Thief of Time* attributes the flute playing to Brigham Houk, a hermit who lives in the canyon, Hillerman dispels the possibility of *chindi* being real. Eyre, on the other hand, validates the existence of *chindi*, and thus justifies the reality of Indigenous belief systems, a powerful notion considering the large audiences that the PBS *Mystery!* series

received. In a review of the film, Burnham finds the adaptation unsatisfying, noting that “Many questions go unanswered such as who was the chindii (ghost) and what was his/her role in the murders?” (Burnham). Even though “audiences are led to believe the apparition played a role, the concluding scenes of the film indicate the apparition had nothing to do with Friedman-Bernal’s disappearance” (De Ruiter 155). While Eyre’s decision to leave the ghost manifestations unexplained may frustrate some viewers, this choice underscores the presence of multiple belief systems, and that some things, such as the *chindi*, simply *cannot* be explained in terms a mainstream audience may accept or understand. Rather, *chindi* must be accepted as one of life’s mysteries. Eyre’s choice to incorporate manifestations of ghosts and then to leave such representations unexplained serves as an example of how he adapted some of the specific cultural content that was embedded in Hillerman’s source text.

Part of what make the movie versions of *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* successful relates to the fact that they are the first films with a Native American director in which Navajo people are depicted.<sup>13</sup> An important aspect to consider when thinking about Eyre’s adaptations relates to how he was able to work with the local communities where *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time* were filmed. To start, Eyre explains that he blessed *Skinwalkers* before starting to film: “The blessing was a ceremony that we did up on the dam earlier in the shoot, and it’s something that I’ve done on all the movies that I’ve been involved with, because it’s the right thing to do. It’s the same thing as a prayer” (“An Interview with Chris Eyre”). Eyre not only blessed the films, but during filming he “tried to minimize the tension present on site by adhering to some of the rules the communities laid out” (De Ruiter 157). For example, parts of *A Thief of Time* were filmed on the Jemez Pueblo, and “the tribal council did not permit filming in the core sections of

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<sup>13</sup> Despite this achievement, it is important to acknowledge that neither Eyre, nor the majority of the cast are Navajo; rather, these individuals represent a multitude of Native Nations.

Jemez Pueblo . . . The film crew was also prohibited from filming a specific mountain that possessed a spiritual significance to the local Indigenous community” (De Ruiter 158). Eyre and his crew honored these requests, creating understanding and harmony with the local community in which they were filming. In *Making Skinwalkers*, a bonus feature on the DVD, Eyre states, “The difference between a good movie and great movie is the positive energy that’s around” (*Skinwalkers*). Eyre was able to achieve a well-done film, because he was willing to do what he characterized as “adher[ing] to the standards of what the community is really about” (*Skinwalkers*). Finally, Eyre also states that, “There is a responsibility that I have as an Indian to these communities,” a perspective that a non-Native director would not have (*Skinwalkers*).

In the article, “Watching Navajos Watch Themselves” Sam Pack explores the first audience that Owens explains that Native American writers must appeal to: audiences of the same tribal affiliation. In the article, Pack shares reactions to *Skinwalkers* from Navajo viewers: “The recruited Navajo spectators disagreed with the basic premise of the film: Medicine men are the only ones with the power to repel the witchcraft caused by skinwalkers, so they have no reason to fear them, as the movie shows” (124). The Navajo viewers also picked up on other issues that clashed with their experiences as Navajo: “Their criticisms of the film ranged from the anecdotal (i.e. Jim Chee’s ‘non-Navajo’ wood-chopping technique) to the more factual (i.e. again, the mispronunciation of Navajo words)” (124). However, even though the Navajo viewers were able to pick up on these issues, “none of these discrepancies seemed to prevent them from enjoying the movie. The Navajo viewers did not nitpick about these details, much less act offended by inaccuracies. In fact, they seemed surprised and even somewhat grateful that their culture was even portrayed on film at all” (124). Even though there are inaccuracies presented in

the film adaptations, the fact that a Native director, Chris Eyre, took on the project and was able to complete it in a respectful way is a big accomplishment.

In the canon of Native American mystery, crime, and detective fiction, Tony Hillerman undoubtedly plays an important role, despite his non-Native identity. Chris Eyre's adaptations of Hillerman's books places a Native American perspective behind these stories, and creates an important set of texts worthy of analysis, since the source texts are full of tribally-specific content, and are penned by a non-Native author, and then adapted for television by a Native American director. As Fatzinger explains in the cases of non-Indigenous adaptations of texts by Indigenous authors, "diminishing the content that ties the story to a specific Native culture" is the status quo (1). Examination of Eyre's adaptations reveals that tribally-specific content is neither increased, nor diminished; rather, Eyre upholds many of the details included in Hillerman's source texts, but what is different are the messages and themes Eyre conveys. In *Skinwalkers*, Eyre juxtaposes Navajo forms of healing with Western medicine, and in *A Thief of Time*, Eyre focuses on the power and existence of *chindi*, acknowledging the power of Indigenous belief systems. In both cases, Eyre validates Indigenous epistemologies. Eyre's changes are important because they show a non-Western worldview to unknowing viewers in ways that are easy to understand and in ways that promote contemplation and thought. Overall, all four pieces use a popular genre—the mystery and detective story—to not only reach broad audiences, but to also share with knowing and unknowing audiences some of the contemporary issues within the Navajo Nation, and Indian Country at large.

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, my goal revolved around examining the characteristics of Native-authored mystery, crime, and detective fiction. In examining a selection of texts, I know my project is not exhaustive of all the Native-authored novels that fall within this category. Despite the fact that this dissertation is incapable of looking at *all* possible books, the novels and films that are analyzed represent a spectrum of mystery, crime, and detective stories: from the historical mysteries about the Osage Oil Murders presented by Linda Hogan and Tom Holm; to the calls to action regarding justice, jurisdiction, and violence against American Indian women offered by Frances Washburn and Louise Erdrich; to the short series that invoke intricate questions about history and identity created by Louis Owens; and, finally, to Tony Hillerman's immensely popular hard-boiled Navajo tribal policemen who are brought to the small screen by Chris Eyre, in which he highlights the distinctions between Western and Indigenous conceptions of healing and spiritual belief. These novels and films illustrate the range of American Indian mystery, crime, and detective stories, and my analysis illuminates the ways in which these texts work to inform and transform readers in regard to issues that surround crime and justice within American Indian contexts.

All of the texts examined in this project highlight the political significances of weaving conventional mystery fictional elements with tribally-specific cultural details; the confluence results in the slight modification of the depicted crime, victim, criminal, and detective—the requisite characteristics of the mystery and detective genre. Considering these four characteristics highlights some of the ways in which the examined texts overlap. In terms of the crimes committed and the victims of those crimes, the majority of the texts present instances of

wrongs being committed against Native people: in *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose*, the victims are Osage individuals who are murdered for their wealth; in *Elsie's Business* and *The Round House*, Native American women are beaten and raped while law enforcement fails to provide any avenues for recourse; in *The Sharpest Sight*, the novel focuses on the mysterious disappearance and murder of Vietnam veteran Attis McCurtain, who is mixed-blood; in *Bone Game*, while the contemporary murders are of college-aged women who are likely non-Native, such crimes highlight and parallel criminal activities of the past—such as displacement, land theft, and also murder—which were directly aimed at Native Americans. Hillerman's texts, and Eyre's adaptations, present slightly different scenarios because, while Navajo people are victims, so too are non-Native individuals. In both iterations of *Skinwalkers*, the victims are all Navajo, but in both versions of *A Thief of Time* the majority of the victims are non-Native, with the exception of Jimmy Etcitty, a Navajo, who is also a pot-hunter.

The criminals depicted in these stories are typically members of mainstream society. For example, in *Mean Spirit*, John Hale and John Tate are exposed as murderers, but only Hale goes to prison, and the text makes it clear that several other murderers remain at large; in *The Osage Rose*, the murderers are, once again, non-Native individuals out for wealth, and in this case they are specifically the Sheriff and his nephew Pete Henderson. In *Elsie's Business*, the first time Elsie is attacked and raped, it is by three non-Native high school boys—brothers Billy and Bobby Mason, and their friend Paul Johnson. When Elsie is later murdered, the criminal is never revealed, although the list of potential suspects largely consists of non-Native men. In *The Round House*, Geraldine is attacked and raped by Linden Lark, who is non-Native.<sup>14</sup> In *The Sharpest*

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<sup>14</sup> It is also important to mention that an instance of domestic violence occurs in *The Round House*; Joe's uncle Whitey beats up his non-Native girlfriend, Sonja, when he believes that she is

*Sight*, the identity of Attis's murderer is never confirmed, although it is implied that the culprits are members of the Nemi family, who are non-Native. In *Bone Game*, the murderers are non-Native students Paul Kantner and Robert Malin.<sup>15</sup> In both versions of *A Thief of Time*, the murderer is non-Native anthropologist Randall Elliot. However, both versions of *Skinwalkers* provide slight deviations, since in the book, the killer is Dr. Yellowhorse, who is Navajo and Lakota, and in the film, the killer is Dr. Stone who is Navajo, who was adopted and raised by a white family.

The detectives discussed in this study convey a diversity of Native people, but not *all* examined texts feature a Native American sleuth. For example, in *Elsie's Business*, the detective is amateur and accidental sleuth, George Washington, who is African-American; in *The Sharpest Sight*, the police detective is Mundo Morales who is Mestizo. Finally, in *The Osage Rose*, Tom Holm casts Irish and Roman Catholic J.D. Daugherty as a private eye and J.D. employs Danny Ryan, a young boy of Irish descent, to help with investigations. However, the majority of detectives examined in this study are indeed Native American. For example, in *Mean Spirit*, the initial detecting is conducted by Osage family and community members, and is later picked up by Federal investigator Stace Red Hawk, who is Lakota. In *The Osage Rose*, the detective doing the investigating in Osage Country is Hoolie Smith, who is Cherokee. In *The Round House*, the main detective is an amateur and accidental sleuth Joe Coutts, who is Anishinaabe. In *The Sharpest Sight*, Cole McCurtain, who is mixed-blood, also investigates with the help of his Choctaw family members, and in *Bone Game*, those Choctaw family members return, and Alex

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cheating on him. This example is only a small scene from the story, but it illuminates that violence against *all* women is an issue that needs to be addressed.

<sup>15</sup> Similar to *The Round House*, Owens includes another specific crime in *Bone Game*: the kidnapping of a Native American woman. Three men kidnap her, two of whom are non-Native, while the other is Native.

Yazzie, a Navajo professor, joins in on the detection as well. Finally, Hillerman and Eyre portray Navajo tribal policemen Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee as the detectives.

The examined writers indigenize the elements of crime, victim, criminal, and detective in multiple ways and specific themes emerge in terms of how the authors do so. For example, in the processes of detection, the majority of detectives rely upon—either voluntarily or by force—Indigenous cultural practices and knowledge to help them solve the crimes. In terms of *Mean Spirit*, Stace Red Hawk participates in a healing ceremony along with individuals who have been directly affected by the murders; Stace is also depicted praying and allowing his spiritual practice to guide him in his investigative process. Similarly, Hoolie uses cultural practices to aid in his investigation: he performs a sweat, allows dreams and traditional Cherokee oral storytelling to guide him, as well as participates in a ceremony with his grandfather, and even follows Cherokee and Osage conceptions of justice. In *Elsie's Business*, even though George Washington is non-Native, he is forced to listen to traditional Lakota oral stories to attempt to understand how to proceed in learning about Elsie's death; in addition, George Washington attends a Wiping of the Tears ceremony. Joe Coutts's journey in *The Round House* requires him to not only learn about Federal Indian Law, but he also listens to traditional Ojibwe oral stories from his grandfather which inform how he enacts justice; furthermore, the community in this novel upholds the traditional Ojibwe form of justice through consensus. In *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*, dreams and visions play prominent roles, and Cole learns about his Choctaw ancestry, which includes a visit to the ancestral homelands where his uncle and grandmother inform him about specific aspects of Choctaw culture. In *Bone Game*, Cole participates in a sweat lodge ceremony, as well as a Native American Church ceremony with peyote, in addition to learning more Choctaw cultural information.

Once again, Hillerman's novels and Eyre's adaptations slightly deviate from the other texts in regard to the confluence of cosmology and detection. For example in both of the books and both film versions—although to a different degree—Joe Leaphorn knows less about Navajo cultural practices than his younger associate Jim Chee, and shows little desire to learn. Leaphorn's detection methodology conforms to ratiocinative and deductive forms of reasoning, while Chee, on the other hand, is very familiar with Navajo spiritual practice, as he is an aspiring medicine man. Chee's desire to simultaneously work as a police officer and medicine man presents issues, since the majority of the characters in the novels and the films see these two roles as contradictory. Certainly Chee disagrees with this, but his employment of spiritual and cultural practices is not as directly linked to his investigations as they are for the other detectives depicted. For example, while Chee discusses ceremonies, and is even portrayed leading a ceremony in the film version of *Skinwalkers*, the practices are not as explicitly connected to the detection process, like they are in the other texts. While Navajo spiritual practice is present, it does not necessarily aid Leaphorn and Chee; rather, Chee's beliefs often serve as a hindrance to his work as a police detective, since death is such a taboo topic in the Navajo worldview. However, while Navajo spiritual practices do not necessarily aid Leaphorn and Chee, both detectives use their cultural competency in prescribed Navajo behaviors to help them solve crimes.

The other way in which Indigenous practices and beliefs heavily influence the mystery genre concerns the resolution and the enactment of justice. Typically, the resolution is “the primary gratification readers obtain from traditional mystery fiction” (Herbert 384) and the quest for justice “is a central theme of mystery fiction which has preoccupied succeeding generations of writers” (Herbert 246). In regard to the resolution and revealing the identity of the criminal,

not all texts examined in this study conform to that notion; for example, in both *Elsie's Business* and *The Sharpest Sight*, the murderer is never identified. In this way, Washburn and Owens present stories that possess verisimilitude since “In real life, many crimes go unsolved even when investigation takes place, [and] many are covered up and not even investigated” (Herbert 384). In *Elsie's Business* and *The Sharpest Sight*, while the criminal is not punished in the typical sense of being identified as the killer, these novels do uphold the mystery genre convention of justice prevailing and order being subsequently restored. For example, In *Elsie's Business*, Deer Woman ensures justice is upheld because after Bobby, Billy, and Paul attack and rape Elsie, they die in a car accident, presumably incited by Deer Woman, since it was a deer in the middle of the road that caused them to swerve and collide head-on into a tree. When Elsie is murdered, the book does not identify her killer, but two potential suspects die under questionable circumstances. Such deaths could be interpreted as Deer Woman seeking vengeance. In *The Sharpest Sight*, the killer is not revealed, but the book ends with the death of two characters that *could* have been involved: Dan Nemi and Jessard Deal. The simultaneous deaths could be interpreted to fit within the parameters of Choctaw blood revenge.

As explained in the *Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, justice is not only an abstract idea, but also “an ambiguous notion which is frequently at odds with strict application of the letter of the law” (Herbert 246). The remaining texts all possess at least one character that decides to take justice into his/her hands, since the American justice system fails to provide it. For example, in *Mean Spirit*, the novel ends with Moses killing John Tate; even though the murder of Tate does not compensate for all of the death waged upon the Osage, the death of this killer upholds the Osage practice of retaliatory killings—which ensure the murdered individual has a companion with whom to enter the spirit world. In *The Osage Rose*, Hoolie murders the

Sheriff and Pete Henderson, an act of revenge that upholds Osage practices of retaliatory killings, as well as Cherokee practices of blood revenge. In *The Round House*, Joe and his friend Cappy kill Linden Lark, and even though many people on the reservation know Joe and Cappy committed this murder, individuals like Whitey and Linda Lark practice consensus by aiding the boys in hiding their crime from law enforcement. In *Bone Game*, both Paul Kantner and Robert Malin are killed, acts that could be interpreted to uphold the Choctaw concept of blood revenge. And finally, in the works of Hillerman and Eyre, so too exists the idea of restoring balance. In both iterations of *A Thief of Time*, Brigham Houk kills murderer Randall Elliot. In the book version of *Skinwalkers*, an unnamed Navajo female who has been wronged by Dr. Yellowhorse kills him with a shotgun; in the film adaptation, though, after Chee and Dr. Stone get into a physical fight, Leaphorn steps in and shoots and kills Dr. Stone. The endings of Hillerman's books and Eyre's adaptations help to maintain the Navajo concept of *hozho*—which can be roughly translated to mean balance or harmony, although the true translation is more complex than that, as Austin notes, since it is a guiding principle in the Navajo belief system.

For some readers, the retaliatory killings may seem like acts of vigilante justice, but closer examination of tribally-specific cultural contexts reveal that such a label is inaccurate. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of the Interior completed a report entitled *Native American Traditional Justice Practices*, in which an expert group examined conceptions of “traditional justice,” a term that “signifies a history and culture that evolved separate from judges in black robes” (Jweied i). Such systems of justice “are often based on restoring harmony and peace to the victim and community—while still including elements of offender accountability” (Jweied i). The goals of the report included 1) “suggesting Federal priorities to support traditional justice,” 2) “identifying alternatives to incarceration based on

Native American traditional practices,” and 3) “Identifying ways that tribes and the Federal government can support traditional justice for both Native American and non-Native American communities” (Jweied ii). The report examines examples of successful traditional justice practices, such as the Navajo Nation’s Peacemaking, the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe’s Talking Circles, and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe’s Wellness Court. While the examples of traditional justice embedded in the books examined in this dissertation may not represent concepts of justice that mainstream Americans would readily support—such as the notion of blood revenge—the acts of traditional justice included in the books work to restore balance and harmony for the victims and the communities, while also holding the offender accountable. This is a key idea to understand when looking at Native American mystery, crime, and detective fiction, because this is a specific area in which Native-authored texts vastly deviate from non-Native-authored texts. Instead of viewing the retaliatory killings in a negative light, it is important that readers understand tribally-specific cultural contexts to comprehend some of the ways in which the depicted individuals and communities respond to crime.

Finally, one of the ideas that came up multiple times in the existing scholarship is the idea that the “ethnic” detective works as a mediator between that individual’s particular ethnicity and the mainstream culture. As Macdonald and Macdonald note, non-mainstream detectives “act as links between cultures, interpreting each to each, mainstream to minority and minority to mainstream” (“Ethnic Detectives in Popular Fiction” 60). While there are levels of mediation, the Native-authored texts in this study do not always provide clear explications of the tribally-specific cultural information and practices embedded in the books. Rather, that responsibility often falls on the reader. For example, Hogan does not explain what role bats play in Osage cosmology; Holm does not explicitly explain the lesson to be learned from the terrapin and the

hare story; neither Washburn nor Erdrich contextualize or explicate the oral stories included in their narratives; Owens explains some aspects of Choctaw culture, but leaves much of the Choctaw language unexplained in *The Sharpest Sight*; in *Bone Game*, Owens again confronts the reader with Choctaw cultural details as well as historical events involving aspects of Ohlone culture, leaving much of it uncontextualized. Hillerman, on the other hand, provides the most straightforward and mediated explanations of Navajo cultural practices, but he also mentions aspects of Navajo cosmology, such as the Holy People and the Blessingway ceremony, without explaining them; Eyre follows Hillerman's lead in explaining some aspects of Navajo culture, but leaving much unmediated.

Overall, the texts and films included in this study utilize a popular and accessible genre to inform, transform, and raise the consciousness of *all* readers and viewers. The texts accomplish this by spotlighting particular issues facing Native American individuals and communities, and do so by depicting American Indian communities in situations of upheaval and violence, raising awareness about historical (e.g. Osage Oil Murders, California Mission system), legal (e.g. development of Federal Indian Law, jurisdiction), cultural (e.g. identity, oral storytelling, cosmology, conceptions of justice), and contemporary (e.g. violence against women, prevalence of crime) issues in Indian Country. At the same time, these writers expect readers to "learn something about the mythology and literary (oral) history of Native Americans," and often that burden falls on the reader (*Other Destinies* 29). Furthermore, American Indian mystery, crime, and detective fiction conveys the diversity of Native American individuals as well as the diversity of Native Nations. In each story, cosmology plays an important role, and to different degrees, provides relevant approaches to contemporary problem-solving. In other words,

problems that have been brought upon these communities by colonization must be resolved—or attempted to be resolved— through the application of Indigenous methodologies.

Due to the large number of Native-authored texts that can be categorized within the mystery, crime, or detective genre, there is certainly no lack of materials to work with for future research.<sup>16</sup> Some possibilities for scholarship include performing analyses based on what Arnold Krupat classifies as a nationalist perspective; Krupat explains that the “nationalist bases her critical position foremost upon her understanding of the term *sovereignty*” (2, italics original). One position within the nationalist mindset includes focusing on questions of sovereignty through the lens of nationhood, and approaching the literature through a primary study of the culture that produces them. One way to perform a nationalist analysis could be done through focusing on a particular author and examining the ways in which they weave conventions of the detective genre with tribally-specific elements; one example that comes to mind is the work of Frances Washburn. While this dissertation examines *Elsie’s Business*, Washburn’s two other novels, *The Sacred White Turkey* (2010) and *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band* (2014), also fit into the mystery and detective genre. Examination of those works and their inclusion of Lakota cultural content as well as how they are in conversation with one another would provide an interesting study of one particular author. Other possibilities for nationalist research include looking at texts by writers who share tribal affiliation and to examine the ways in which such writers incorporate specific cultural details. For example, a study on writers of Choctaw descent is a possibility, with the multiple mystery novels by Louis Owens, LeAnne Howe’s *Shell Shaker* (2001), as well as the numerous mystery stories of Todd Downing. Another possibility includes looking at Cherokee writers, like Thomas King, writing as Hartley Goodweather, in

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<sup>16</sup> At this point in time, I have identified 67 Native-authored texts that can be categorized within the mystery, crime, and detective genre. See Appendix A for the complete list.

*DreadfulWater Shows Up* (2002) and *The Red Power Murders* (2006), and Sara Sue Hoklotubbe's Sadie Walela mystery series (with the first text published in 2003)—to name a few, since there are several Cherokee writers working within this genre.

Still, another area of research could consider the ways in which Native-authored mysteries are published and marketed. For example, since a large number of Native-authored texts are published by university presses, looking at publishing houses and how they fashion and market texts could yield an interesting study. For example, an examination guided by narrative theory, such as looking at the peritextual elements of a work like the cover, the title, and the contextual information the writer includes, could reveal important distinctions between Native-authored and non-Native-authored mystery and detective texts.

Native-authored texts also present implications for pedagogy; for example, in her article "Decolonizing the Choctaws: Teaching LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker*," Patrice Hollrah argues that the novel "gives students an opportunity to learn that the history and culture of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma are alive today" (73). While a similar argument can be made in regard to many other Native-authored texts—books that aren't necessarily mystery, crime, or detective fiction—the mystery genre provides the opportunity to not only learn about history and culture, but also about topics such as law, contemporary issues, and even geography. For example, in Stanley D. Orr's article, "Anthropologists as Detectives and Detectives as Anthropologists," he discusses how the works of Hillerman—in addition to other writers—have aided in sparking thoughtful discussion in the undergraduate anthropology course. In fact, the book *Murder 101: Essays on the Teaching of Detective Fiction* presents multiple general pedagogical ideas about mystery and detective fiction that could be easily applied to American Indian-authored mystery, crime, and detective novels.

In addition, Native American mystery, crime, and detective fiction provides avenues for investigations of true crime. Simon Ortiz's "The Killing of a State Cop" (1974) and Leslie Marmon Silko's "Tony's Story" (1974) both present fictional portrayals of a 1952 murder of a New Mexico state cop committed by two Acoma brothers. While both of the stories may not contain the requisite detective and forms of detection to make them mystery or detective fiction, they certainly possess elements of crime. Lawrence J. Evers's article "The Killing of a New Mexican State Trooper: Ways of Telling an Historical Event" observes the tensions between law enforcement and Native communities, and how cultural belief systems may have inspired the brothers' decision to kill the policeman. While this is just one example, mystery, crime, and detective fiction can provide a bridge between contemporary crime affecting American Indian communities and individuals, and inspire conversations that foster both understanding of and generation of culturally-appropriate resolution practices. In other words, such investigations can lead to nuanced discussions of the intersection of cultural beliefs and law and policy.

Native-authored detective fiction can also be considered in relation to larger notions of indigenaeity or even within the area of women and gender studies. For example, it would be interesting to juxtapose Native American mystery, crime, and detective fiction with texts of writers who hail from countries other than the U.S. but who include elements of Indigenous cultures, such as Chicana writer Lucha Corpi, or even the non-Aboriginal Australian author Arthur Upfield. In terms of gender, while all of the texts featured in this dissertation cast males in the role of detective, there are Native-authored novels with female characters serving as the sleuth; a few examples are Washburn's *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band* and Hoklotubbe's Sadie Walela mystery series. As evidenced, the number of Native-authored mystery novels presents a rich, and largely unexplored, area for potential future research.

In focusing on a selection of Native American mystery, crime, and detective novels, this dissertation sheds light on a specific sub-genre within Native American literature that has, to date, received little scholarly attention. One of the goals of this dissertation involved examining some of the specific aspects of Native American mystery, crime and detective fiction, but the larger, more overarching goal was “to make readers more aware that for fiction about Indians they can go directly to Indian authors rather than to the immense American library of fiction about Indians by Euramerican writers” (*Other Destinies* 22). I have attempted to discuss these texts in a respectful way that acknowledges the historical, political, and cultural facets that rest behind the creation of American Indian literature. In inserting various aspects of American Indian cultures, histories, and perspectives, the writers included in this study make the political statement that colonizers have not succeeded in eliminating American Indian peoples. And yet, the political statements of these texts extend beyond assertion of continued existence, since the authors examined in this study also announce that Indigenous ways of knowing, seeing, and perceiving the world persist, and they are particularly relevant within the context of mystery, crime, and detective work.

## APPENDIX A: NATIVE-AUTHORED MYSTERY, CRIME, AND DETECTIVE FICTION

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