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Writing Their Bodies: Restoring Rhetorical Relations at the Carlisle Indian School.
By Sarah Klotz. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2021. 150 pages. \$22.95 paper.

What premises and assumptions underlie English language learning in the United States? For Sarah Klotz, who identifies as a “scholar engaged in the teaching of writing,” some records from the country’s first, and perhaps foremost, off-reservation boarding school present a disturbing answer (5). In *Writing Their Bodies*, Klotz exposes literacy as not only a key tool of the assimilation program, but also a powerful weapon of colonial violence. In this work, letters authored by students, parents, and Carlisle’s infamous superintendent, Colonel Richard Henry Pratt, as well as student sketchbooks and school periodicals, reveal the genocidal logic behind the supplanting of Western rhetoric for Indigenous modes of expression. Academic literature dedicated to the consequences of this project is legion, as is literature on Indian boarding schools generally. Indeed, Carlisle in particular has received extended and extensive scholarly attention for several decades. Klotz is keenly aware of her intellectual genealogy, which she traces directly in her writing: influential boarding school historians, such as David Wallace Adams, Brenda J. Child, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, are credited throughout, together with key literary theorists like Gerald Vizenor and Scott Richard Lyons.

The distinguishing feature of Klotz’s analysis is what she terms “rhetoric of relations,” defined as “multimodal” and “embodied” forms of communication developed to “resist and repurpose alphabetic literacy” (5). In that this term compels us to expand our understanding of rhetoric beyond the written word, *Writing Their Bodies* is a story of Native resistance, one that can only be told by translating the extratextual evidence found in the drawings and writings of Carlisle students and parents. In the first chapter, “Plains Pictography and Embodied Resistance at Fort Marion,” this entails Klotz’s close reading of sketches made by one of Pratt’s earliest “students,” Etahdleuh Doanmoe, who had been one of the seventy-two Native prisoners held at Fort Marion, where the allegedly rehabilitative curriculum there had inspired that of Carlisle.

Doanmoe documented his experiences in captivity and beyond in a series of sketches that Pratt later compiled and published under the title *A Kiowa’s Odyssey*. Klotz’s reading isolates two sketches from Doanmoe’s collection, both of which pertain to a suicide attempt on the journey to Fort Marion made by a fellow prisoner, Lean Bear. In Klotz’s analysis, Doanmoe’s sketches aren’t renderings drawn to help him make sense of his journey through a changing world. Rather, they’re Kiowa-style pictographs produced to help make sense of the world to others, in particular Doanmoe’s fellow captives and community back home. As the author forwards these sketches as evidence of an enduring “communicative system indigenous to the Southern plains,” one in which a speaker uses “pictographs to recall and narrate key events” (43), possible notions of a Native-authored Greek epic are shattered.

Although the resilience of Kiowa expressivity amidst oppression has been addressed by others—including Janet Berlo, cited here, and Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote more recently—Klotz pushes us to think again, expansively. Why did Doanmoe choose to sketch Lean Bear’s suicide attempt? What does Lean Bear’s body signify

in Doanmoe's drawing and what is it meant to signify to Native viewers? For Klotz, the significance of Lean Bear's body on the page reflects the value that he ascribed to his body in life: shackled and carried thousands of miles away from his tribe, the Cheyenne chief used his body, one of the few things left to him, to resist. Klotz applies the conventions of Plains ledger art to argue that because Lean Bear's prone body is positioned on the *left* side of Doanmoe's sketch, his attempted suicide is treated as the courageous act of a warrior. In simpler, starker terms, Indigenous suicide in the context of captivity is read and presented as a heroic victory. Given Lean Bear's motivations and their translation to Doanmoe's page, Klotz encourages us to read Lean Bear's self-wounding as "embodied" rhetoric, a move that enables us to recognize and acknowledge messages of resistance or otherwise communicated through bodies and not just words.

Klotz carries this thread into the book's remaining chapters, where she identifies moments of embodied communication at Carlisle during its earliest years. Examples include the use of Plains Sign Talk between Plains and non-Plains students, as well as other instances of self-harm and suicide. The latter, of course, is a troubling history whose consequences continue to resound in Native communities today, but in many ways that is precisely Klotz's point: the self-inflicted deaths of Carlisle students are full of meaning, not the least of which is the refusal to comply. Expanding the definition of rhetoric to include embodied communication ensures that the meaning of these students' deaths remains legible. By adopting a "rhetoric of relations," the body of student Ernest White Thunder, the subject of chapter 3, "continues to represent an injustice the colonial government cannot erase" and an act of resistance we cannot misread (72).

Although the relevance of Klotz's work to the field of American Indian and Indigenous studies is clear, her primary audience seems to be located elsewhere: rhetoric and composition, perhaps, or English literature more broadly. Indeed, Klotz reserves some of her sharpest critiques for literacy studies, though the best of these are relegated to the footnotes. It's here, for instance, that she thunders, "Despite correctives offered by New Literacy Studies . . . our field still needs to account for centuries of colonial mythology passing as literacy scholarship" (127). She goes on to condemn the minimization of decolonizing scholarship as a subfield or "special interest" in the "still Western-centric" areas of literacy and rhetoric. Locating these important critiques front and center would have brought greater force to this powerful book.

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