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Literary Criticism in *Cogewea:* Mourning Dove's Protagonist Reads *The Brand*

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Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, the Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range* (1927) is one of the first pieces of fiction written by a Native American woman.[1] Although scholars have discussed *Cogewea* and its author, Mourning Dove,[2] they have not commented on the fact that this novel also contains some of the first literary criticism by a Native American.[3] I am referring especially to chapter 10, where the title character reads a novel called *The Brand* and angrily denounces it. As Cogewea reads the book, she becomes "absorbed with rage" (*Cogewea*, 88). Her "fury" increases as she reads (*Cogewea*, 89–90), and, later, she throws "the hateful volume" to the floor (*Cogewea*, 90). At the very end of the chapter, she finds "solace in consigning the maligning volumn [sic] to the kitchen stove" (*Cogewea*, 96). Although Cogewea does not identify the author or the date of the novel she finds so offensive, the book can be no other than Therese Broderick's *The Brand: A Tale of the Flathead Reservation* (1909).[4] I am not the first to identify the novel or to suggest that there was a connection between it and *Cogewea*,[5] but, before now, no one has explored either that novel or that connection in any detail. After summarizing the central events in *The Brand*, I will first discuss the identity of the critic who denounces the novel; second, I will consider the

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similarities and differences between *The Brand* and *Cogewea*; third, I will uncover the principle of literary criticism implicit in Cogewea's denunciation of *The Brand*; fourth, I will determine how fair that denunciation is; and, fifth, I will suggest that Mourning Dove has Cogewea misread *The Brand* in order to characterize her and to warn other Indians about the dangers of refusing to take to heart the implications of stories. If I am right, then *Cogewea* is a far subtler book than has previously been assumed.

The Brand is an early prototype of what has come to be called an "Indian romance."[6] The focal character is a white woman who travels west to Montana. Before we consider the basis for Cogewea's violent rejection of *The Brand*, we should review quickly the characters and plot of the novel to which she reacts so angrily:

Bess Fletcher is a twenty-year-old woman who leaves a New York convent school and heads to Montana with her brother James, who is eager to rejoin his old Harvard classmate, Henry West. Henry is the quarter-Flathead son of Scotsman Colin West, who married a woman of half-Indian blood "and yet one of the most refined and intellectual of women" (*Brand*, 17). At his father's death, Henry had left law school to manage the family's prosperous ranch on the Flathead Reservation in Montana. James Fletcher has spent several vigorous summers as a cowhand on the ranch, and now Henry has offered him the position of ranch foreman. After the death of James's parents, he heads to Montana with his sister.

On the last leg of the train trip, James and Bess are joined by Dave Davis, the Indian agent for the Flathead Reservation. Davis is attracted to Bess, who is too naive to sense that his affections are selfish and insincere. She is also deaf to the truth that her heart shouts to her: She loves Henry West, the mixed-blood rancher who meets their train. Bess immediately likes Mrs. West, Henry's half-Flathead mother. Mrs. West comes almost immediately to be the "little Mother" Bess never knew in her own family.

Bess has a series of experiences and adventures in Montana: She helps her "little Mother" to nurse Dave Davis back to health after he injures his leg in a fall from his horse; she visits some Catholic-convert Indian children at the St. Ignatius Mission, where she sees the grave of Henry's sister Helen, who had died of causes no one will discuss openly; she is wooed by the bold Dave Davis, whereupon "the veil was lifted from her virgin soul, and the miracle of womanhood was wrought!" (*Brand*, 94); she learns how to use a

gun and eventually kills a rattlesnake; she watches the ranch hands drive a herd of cattle across an icy river on the way to market; she tells "little Mother" the story of Berenice Morton's sister Grace, who had been jilted in pregnancy by a man who had promised to marry her; she goes to a horse race and an Indian dance and then on a ten-day camping trip on the reservation; she is rescued by Henry West from almost certain death when a herd of cattle stampedes; she nearly marries the vile Dave Davis but at the very last moment comes to realize that he is the same man who ruined and finally caused the deaths of both Grace Morton and Helen West. On the last page, just as she is about to board the train home to New York, Bess finds that she can, after all, forget that Henry West is an Indian, and she decides to stay in Montana and marry him.

The Brand is silly pop-fiction, and it is easy enough to understand why an Indian reader might be annoyed with it.

COGEWEA AS CRITIC

One of the most vexing problems in *Cogewea* scholarship is the question of authorship or, more specifically, the extent to which Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, Mourning Dove's friend and mentor, rewrote the novel originally drafted by Mourning Dove. It is known that McWhorter edited the novel substantially. Indeed, McWhorter is mentioned by name on the title page as the author of several other books and the supplier of the "Notes and Biographical Sketch" for *Cogewea*. Although McWhorter was not an Indian, he is mentioned by his Indian name, Sho-pow-tan, on the title page as the person the novel was "given through." There is no question whatever that McWhorter had a hand in revising—even rewriting—the novel for publication. Mourning Dove wrote to McWhorter on 4 June 1928, after reading the published version of her novel, that she was

> surprised at the changes that you made. I think they are fine, and you made a tasty dressing like a cook would do with a fine meal . . . . I felt like it was some one elses [sic] book and not mine at all. In fact the finishing touches are put there by you, and I have never seen it.[7]

Because Mourning Dove's original manuscript has never been found, we will probably never know precisely what the "finishing

touches" were, who wrote what parts of the book, or what part McWhorter played in the writing of chapter 10.

It is safe to assume that Mourning Dove wrote the initial draft of chapter 10 but that McWhorter, who had a wider vocabulary and more florid style, substantially revised it. Near the end of the chapter, we find these lines—surely written by McWhorter rather than by Mourning Dove:

> Cogewea reflected bitterly how her race had had the worst of every deal since the landing of the lordly European on their shores; how they had suffered as much from the pen as from the bayonet of conquest; wherein the annals had always been chronicled by their most deadly foes and partisan writers .... She spurned with resentment the implied inference that she was not the social equal of the most exalted of her self-constituted supermundanes .... Sterling manhood and womanhood, she was sure, carried with it, the elements of racial vanity; and as a stream cannot rise above its source, the "slaving hero" was doomed to a malarial death amid the brackish pools flowing from the quill of this neoteric writer. (*Cogewea*, 91–92)

With only slender formal schooling,[8] Mourning Dove supported herself and her family by a series of jobs, including one as a migrant fruit picker. Although she liked to read dime novels, it is impossible to believe that she would have referred to "the bayonet of conquest," "partisan writers," "racial vanity," and "self-constituted supermundanes," or that she would call the author "neoteric" rather than "young" or "modern." Although some portions of chapter 10 are clearly McWhorter's, I have no doubt that Mourning Dove had read *The Brand*. She loved to read, and she was living in Polson, Montana, where part of *The Brand* is set, when the novel was published. Just a year earlier, she had married Hector McLeod, who was one-quarter Flathead, and with him had set up a livery business there. Mourning Dove would surely have wanted to read such a novel, and there is no reason to doubt that she did read it and that, in some sense, it contributed to the genesis of *Cogewea*. Leaving to others the frustratingly impossible task of trying to determine exactly which sentences or parts of sentences McWhorter may have contributed to chapter 10,[9] I shall, in the remainder of this paper, use the terms *author*[10] and *Mourning Dove* to refer to the writing team consisting of an Indian woman and her white male collaborator.

FIGURE 3. The frontispiece to Cogewea *(1927). For a photograph of Mourning Dove taken some years later, see Jay Miller,* Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography *(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).*

Is Mourning Dove the literary critic who finds Broderick's *The Brand* to be so offensive, or is the critic Cogewea herself, the title character in the novel, who angrily consigns the hated volume to the flames? To some extent, of course, it is both. The flaws of *The Brand* would have been apparent both to a fiction writer named Mourning

Dove and to a half-blood character named Cogewea, who is involved in a romantic situation something like the one described in *The Brand*. I shall return later to a brief discussion of Mourning Dove as critic, but first I will focus on the criticism by Cogewea, the character who reads *The Brand*, is angered by it, and finally burns it.

Cogewea's anger apparently is caused less by *The Brand*'s flaws as a work of literature than by her own involvement in events similar to those in that novel. Because her response is so personal and so vehement, it leads us into a consideration not only of *The Brand* but also—and far more interestingly—of Cogewea's own developing character.

COGEWEA AND *THE BRAND*

Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* reflects, in some ways, the basic structure, plot, and characterization of Therese Broderick's *The Brand*. It has a similar number of pages (285, compared with 271 in *The Brand*), divided into a similar number of chapters (31, compared with 30 in *The Brand*). Both novels take place in western Montana, on a cattle ranch on the Flathead Indian Reservation, and both mention the town of Polson and the steamer on Lake Flathead. The ranch in one novel is named the "HW" (for Henry West and "Honor Women"), while in the other it is the "H-B" (for Horseshoe Bend).[11] Both ranches were or are owned by Scotsmen who married Indian women, apparently so they could gain ownership of reservation land. On each ranch is an old-style tipi inhabited by an old-time Indian who refuses to live in a house. In both novels, the heroine

- is a young woman who, after the death of her mother, is educated in a convent school.
- comes from the East to Montana.
- helps nurse back to health a white man from the East who is injured in a fall from a horse and who then tries, with harrowingly near success, to woo her.
- accompanies the male cowhands on some of their roundups and drives.
- attends a Fourth of July celebration on the reservation, in which there are horse races and Indian dances.
- shoots a snake after it frightens her horse and causes it to throw her.

- is the social superior of the mixed-blood rancher who loves her but who despairs of winning her because she views him as only a "brother."
- foolishly falls for a more exciting but morally inferior white Easterner.
- thinks of moving to the East but cannot bear to leave the lovely rivers and mountains of Montana.
- comes to see the truth about her villainous white suitor.
- happily decides to stay on the Montana cattle range and marry her mixed-blood suitor.

The basic plots of the two novels are so similar that one suspects that Mourning Dove may have planned her book as a parodic rejection of the earlier one. It is almost as if she read *The Brand* and said, "So that is what you think Indian life is like! Well, let me tell you a more accurate version of that story." The rejection comes out not only in the explicit discussion of *The Brand* in chapter 10 but also in a series of fundamental changes Mourning Dove makes in the structure, plot, and characterization in *Cogewea.*

The most important change is that, in *Cogewea,* the protagonist is mixed-blood rather than white, a fact that alters the central understanding of events. Cogewea was sent to the East to be educated at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania and has recently returned. Unlike Bess, at the start of the novel she is already an experienced rider, fully at home in the western Montana cattle country. Cogewea is a local Indian with a local family; thus she is infused with Indian values and traditions. The most important member of that family is her maternal grandmother, Stemteemä, who remembers the old ways before the coming of the whites and who tells traditional stories and tales of the Okanogan people. With her ancestry and background, Cogewea is firm in defending the history, customs, and rights of Indian peoples: "Sympathy for my trampled race—the once dignified native American—throbs my very being" (*Cogewea,* 147). It throbs the novel, also.

Another change Mourning Dove makes is in the portrayal of white men and white institutions. Although John Carter, Cogewea's brother-in-law, is portrayed positively, her Scottish father, McDonald, is an out-and-out villain who abandons his family to seek gold—and another wife—in Alaska. Cogewea's would-be lover, Alfred Densmore, is more greedily calculating than Bess's suitor, Dave Davis. Whereas Davis comes across as a

cowardly womanizer who is at least somewhat attracted to Bess, Densmore is a money-grubbing, cowardly womanizer who feels little but contempt for Cogewea.

More might be said about similarities and differences in *The Brand* and *Cogewea*, but my purpose is only to lay the groundwork for considering the central principle of literary criticism in Cogewea's rejection of *The Brand*.

RACISM IN *THE BRAND*

Chapter 9 of *Cogewea*, "Under the Whispering Pines," takes place one afternoon two weeks after the white easterner Densmore breaks his arm. In a romantic setting beside a river, Densmore asks Cogewea to write a letter for him. In dictating the letter, he leads the naive Cogewea to believe that he loves this "brown beauty of the range" (*Cogewea*, 87). She is troubled and confused by his attentions, but she is excited also. Chapter 10, "Lo! the Poor 'Breed,'" takes place the next afternoon. As Densmore takes his siesta in the bunk house, Cogewea, having "half expected the Easterner to join her" for the afternoon, tries to "interest herself in a book" (*Cogewea*, 88) as a distraction from her troubling thoughts: "The girl, vexed and disappointed, had resorted to reading but with no concentration of thought. The theme, an unjust presentation of Indian sentiment and racial traits; *The Brand*—stigma of the blood—did not tend towards calming her perturbed mind. In sheer desperation she continued poring through the pages" (*Cogewea*, 88). She becomes deeply absorbed and finally quite angry at what she reads.

In revealing why she casts down and finally destroys the novel, Cogewea indicates that the controlling principle of her literary criticism is racism. Cogewea is aware that such books as *The Brand* might find favor with white readers but not with Indians: "The story, interesting to the whites, was worm-wood to her Indian spleen" (*Cogewea*, 91). Cogewea refers to *The Brand* as a "'maligning, absurdity of a book. The thing does nothing but slam the breeds! as if they were reptiles instead of humans'" (*Cogewea*, 89). After first throwing the book down and stalking angrily away, she later returns to pick it up, "determined to see how much of an ape the author had made of her breed-hero" (*Cogewea*, 91).

Cogewea's anger would be widely shared by many readers today, who would agree that, of course, writers should not be

racist, should not put down Indians with derogatory racial stereotypes. It is curious, however, that Cogewea's violent rejection of *The Brand* seems to have been based on a hasty reading of the book and that her anger seems out of proportion to the offensiveness of *The Brand.* Indeed, her anger with the novel appears more personal than literary.

Cogewea is not fully justified in her condemnation of *The Brand* for its racist treatment of Indians. Her statement that *The Brand* does no more than "'slam the *breeds!* as if they were reptiles instead of humans'" (*Cogewea,* 89) is curious. A closer reading of the book than she apparently had time for seems to show that, far from "slamming" the breeds, *The Brand* holds them up for admiration. Surely the most admirable characters in the novel are Henry West, a quarter-blood, and his mother, a half-blood Flathead. Henry is kind, loving, and honest, a fine character foil for the shallow, selfish, and deceitful white Indian agent, Davis. His mother, as we shall see later, is most sympathetic. To be sure, Broderick tends to stereotype Indians, but she can scarcely be said to "slam" them.

As for the "reptilian" imagery, apparently Cogewea is thinking of various phrases in *The Brand* that compare Indians with animals: A hungry Indian comes into the camp at one point, for example, and, when given a meal, falls "to devouring the food, almost like a hungry dog" (*Brand,* 192); Henry West is said to spring onto his horse "with the agility of a cat" (*Brand,* 107). And several of the characters group Indians with dangerous or threatening beasts. Before Berenice Morton comes to visit Bess, she writes that her father thinks "'I will surely be eaten by bears or buffalos or captured by the Indians'" (*Brand,* 124). When Berenice gets to the ranch, Bess offers to take her for a walk beside the lake. Berenice says, "'Bess! don't take me if there is any danger of mountain lions, or bears, or—or—Indians'" (*Brand,* 222). And even Mrs. West, Henry's mother, advises Bess to carry a gun: "'Yes, dear, one cannot tell what unexpected danger might arise. A drunken Indian, or an infuriated steer, or even a rattlesnake may molest one'" (*Brand,* 108).

We do find these animal comparisons, but Cogewea seems to overlook the context in which they appear. Is it really an insult, for example, to suggest that a half-starved Indian eats "almost like a hungry dog"? The focus in that scene is more on the pitiful hunger of the old man than on his unsophisticated eating habits. Is it really an insult to have Henry leap into the saddle "with the agility

of a cat," or does that merely contrast his equestrian skills favorably with those of the clumsy Densmore? And Berenice's and her father's foolish fears, after all, are proved unfounded by the events of the novel. Henry's mother is also proved wrong: The real danger in the novel, the one for which Bess really needs the gun, turns out to be a white man, not a drunken Indian, intent on raping her. As for portraying Indians as "reptiles," the only time Broderick portrays them as such is in the Fourth of July Snake Dance, where the Indians, to the admiration of all, dance like snakes. Bess admires one of the dancers: "See how he stretches out his neck and writhes his body like a huge reptile, curving now to the right, till his face nearly touches his shoulder, and swiftly moving forward and again to the left, in long gliding vibrations! Some of his manoeuvers were so suggestive of a living snake, that Bess could feel her flesh creep" (*Brand*, 157). Is it really a racial slur to call Indians "reptiles" in the context of a native dance effectively performed? We should note, in any case, that Broderick compares other characters besides Indians to animals. Davis, the only villain in the story, is said to be a "vulture" (*Brand*, 149) and a "dog" (*Brand*, 245) and is branded like a calf with the letters *HW* (*Brand*, 266) at the climax of the novel. Even Bess is compared to animals: She runs from the aggressive Dave Davis "like a frightened deer" (*Brand*, 201) and later tilts her head "like a saucy wren" (*Brand*, 215).[12]

To be sure, some subtly racist attitudes are expressed in the comparisons of Indians to animals in *The Brand*. On one of the cattle drives, the Indian herders cross the river by swimming with the cattle, while the white cowboys all cross high and dry on the ferry. Not only does no one question why the "bucks" are sent into the icy river with the cattle, but the comparison of the singing of the Indians to the snorting of the animals is derogatory: "The snorts of the reluctant animals mingled with the song that went up from the bucks" (*Brand*, 110). And Broderick does seem to believe that there is a "latent savagery" in Indians. Henry West's mother is so incensed at the story of Grace Morton's betrayal that she says she would kill the young woman's lover if she knew who he was. Here is Bess's reaction: "For the first time since Bess had come to the HW ranch she had seen the latent savagery aroused" (*Brand*, 127). Mrs. West herself says that stories of betrayal "'always make me lose control of myself, and I feel like the wild creatures who are ever guarding their young against the onslaughts of danger'" (*Brand*, 129).

Certainly there are genuinely racist characters in *The Brand*. Dave Davis is prejudiced, but we see his prejudice only in small

ways, as when he refers in jest to the unpleasant smell of an Indian tipi (*Brand,* 13). Davis is a corrupt agent, but we see few of his official actions except when he uses his power to seduce Indian women (as in the scene where he mistakes Bess for one). Clearly, however, his racism is disparaged by Broderick, and Davis is branded for it at the end of the novel. Is Cogewea fair in condemning a novel as racist if its worst racists are punished and the others come to see the errors of their ways?

Sweet Bess Fletcher is one of those who turn away from their prejudices. Bess begins *The Brand* as a racist. When she is annoyed that Henry West kills a low-breed bull that is destroying the quality of his own herd, she responds, "'Yes, that is all you are now—an Indian thirsting for the blood of your victim!'" (*Brand,* 82). When Henry's mother says that her son would be an inappropriate suitor to Bess because "'he is—he is—only an Indian!'" Bess leaps forward with this remark: "'What difference need that make! He has the whitest heart!'" (*Brand,* 99). Surely it is racist to suggest that an Indian is good to the extent that he has a white heart. Later, when Bess witnesses Henry branding Dave Davis, she hurls at him the greatest insult she can think of for a man who would perform such a savage act: "'You—*Indian,*' she cried, with abhorrence" (*Brand,* 267). In the end, however, Bess makes progress in overcoming her racist attitudes by learning to forget that Henry West is an Indian. The last line of the novel is, "'I cannot live without you now! Henry—Henry West! *I—have forgotten!*'" (*Brand,* 271). It may seem subtly racist to late-twentieth-century readers for a white woman to give herself as a kind of lily-prize to an Indian, but, given the miscegenist attitudes and laws of the early twentieth century, it was progressive for Bess to forget Henry's blood quantum and think of him as a human being worthy of her love.

As for Henry West himself, he seems to have absorbed the racist attitudes of the white culture around him. Referring to his dark skin, Henry tells his best friend, James Fletcher, "'Jim, sometimes I feel that I could willingly be skinned alive, if it would make me—like you.'" The omniscient narrator comments that, with that remark, "the secret desire of his heart and soul escaped his lips" (*Brand,* 26). Henry has not found the woman of his dreams "among the girls of his own people" (*Brand,* 35)—meaning the Indians—but he instantly loves the fair Bess Fletcher. He despairs of winning her, afraid to speak to her of his love. Rather than speak, he imagines a conversation in which he says, "'I can not, dare not even presume to touch your hand! Oh, the irony of fate!

You are so fair, so white—I, O God! I am but an Indian!'" (*Brand*, 35). Henry clearly has an image problem. He cannot tell Bess of his love for her because "'I am—but—an Indian—insensible to love, incapable of feeling; unfit for any place'" (*Brand*, 248). On the camping trip, Bess dresses as an Indian woman. When she asks Henry if he likes to see her dressed up as a "squaw," he replies, "'If all squaws looked as well, a man wouldn't mind being an Indian'" (*Brand*, 204). But Indian women do not look like dressed-up white women, and Henry, who has internalized the racism around him, does mind being an Indian. Is *The Brand* a racist novel because one of its Indian characters is discontented with being an Indian? If *The Brand* were a thoroughly racist novel, would Broderick give Henry this thought: "What right has the world to give me a desire for knowledge, a taste of heaven, an understanding of the past, a dread of the future, and then hold up its hands to say, 'You are still an Indian'" (*Brand*, 103)?

COGEWEA'S REACTION TO *THE BRAND*

The significant point is not that there are racist elements in *The Brand*; the point is that Cogewea overemphasizes those elements and reacts to them out of proportion to their importance in the novel. And her reaction tells us more about her own feelings than it does about *The Brand*.

There is evidence that Cogewea is hasty in her reading of *The Brand*. For one thing, we are told that she is so preoccupied with her romantic thoughts of Densmore that she scarcely pays attention to the novel she is reading. She sits on the veranda "endeavoring to interest herself" (*Cogewea*, 88) in it. She reads the book "with no concentration of thought" (*Cogewea*, 88). Then, "at last Cogewea became absorbed" (*Cogewea*, 88), but she is furious at what she sees. Almost immediately, she is interrupted by Jim LaGrinder, the half-blood foreman. After a nasty interchange with him, she throws the book down and stalks off. Then she returns to the veranda and picks up the book again. She apparently skims or "sketches" the book to find out the general plot: "By adroit sketching, she had, in a short time, the gist of the plot" (*Cogewea*, 91). She summarizes:

> The scene opened on the Flathead, where a half-blood "brave" is in love with a white girl; the heroine of the story. He dares

> not make a declaration of his affection, because of his Indian blood. He curses his own mother for this heritage, hates his American parent for the sake of the girl in his heart. He deems himself beneath her; not good enough for her. But to cap the absurdity of the story, he weds the white "princess" and slaves for her the rest of his life. (*Cogewea*, 91)

Cogewea is not at all pleased with this plot. She is particularly annoyed at the portrayal of an Indian man who will "slave" for a white woman:

> Cogewea leaned back in her chair with a sigh. "Bosh!" she mused half aloud. "Show me the Red 'buck' who would slave for the most exclusive white 'princess' that lives. Such hash may go with the whites, but the Indian, both full bloods and the despised breeds know differently. And that a 'hero' should be depicted as hating his own mother for the flesh and heart that she gave his miserable frame. What a figure to be held up for laudation by either novelist or historian! No *man*, whether First American, Caucasian or of any other race, could be so beastly inhuman in real life; so low and ungratefully base as to want to hide his own mother. (*Cogewea*, 91)

That is a curiously wrong-headed understanding of *The Brand*. Broderick's novel opens not on the Flathead lake or river or reservation but on a train that deposits the weary travelers thirty-five miles from the ranch. Henry West is a quarter-blood, not a half-blood, and never in the novel is he called a "brave." Bess is not a "princess," and there is no indication whatever that Henry is going to "slave" for her after they get married.

The most curious feature of Cogewea's summary of *The Brand*, however, is her repeated, outraged comment that Henry West "curses" and "hates" and wants "to hide" his Indian mother. That is simply not so in *The Brand*. On the contrary, he honors and adores her. Early in the novel, shortly after he meets Bess, Henry thinks about his mother: "My mother! How I love her! What an honor to be my mother's son!" (*Brand*, 35). There is no hint that we are supposed to read that statement as laced with cruel sarcasm. Later, when Dave Davis is injured, Henry offers to watch over him so that Henry's mother, a trained nurse, can get some rest:

> Henry came over to his mother's side, and kissing her gently on the brow, told her that he would spend the night looking after Mr. Davis.

> But she said: "No, dear, you go to bed and rest, and when I need you I will call you." . . . Bess' heart went out to this great, dark man, as she saw his gentleness. She thought that any man who so reverenced his mother must be worthy of greatest confidence and trust. (*Brand*, 50)

Indeed, Bess likes Henry West in large measure because he is "'so generous, thoughtful, kind; so tender with his mother'" (*Brand*, 225). Surely there is no irony here or a few pages later, when Henry speaks to his mother with "tenderness and love" (*Brand*, 248). Never once does he curse her or try to hide her or show any shame for or anger with her.

How could Cogewea get it so wrong? One explanation is that Mourning Dove misread or forgot *The Brand* and did not bother to get the facts straight. Another is that she deliberately falsified the novel, transforming it into a straw man so she could blow it away. I suggest, rather, that Mourning Dove purposefully portrays Cogewea as so distracted by her infatuation with Alfred Densmore that, rather than reading *The Brand* clearheadedly, she misreads it in such a way that it feeds her own self-serving anger. When Densmore comes up to her after an unsuccessful fishing venture and finds that she is angry, he asks if she is angry with him:

> "I'm not mad at you. It is this book!"
>
> "What is wrong with the inoffensive bundle of paper in board covers?"
>
> "Wrong? It is all wrong; absurdly foolish. It is locoed; crazy! I cannot express my contempt for it; it is so ridiculously low and shamefully shallow." (*Cogewea*, 92–93)

Cogewea protests too much. *The Brand*, foolish as it is, does not warrant such anger. Her reaction is more personal than literary. Cogewea seems to be so jealous of the whiteness and privilege of Bess, the protagonist of the novel, that she wishes that she, like Bess, could be attractive to a white easterner. Her anger comes from her frustration.

COGEWEA'S SELF-INVOLVED MISREADING OF *THE BRAND*

One of the finest features of *Cogewea* is that it permits us to see Cogewea as an imperfect heroine who is psychologically consis-

tent in her furious misinterpretation of Broderick's *The Brand*. Let us recall the setting for Cogewea's reading of *The Brand*. That morning, she has been led by Densmore to believe that he is in love with her. He is not, of course, but Cogewea wants to believe the exciting possibility that a handsome, fair-skinned easterner might fall in love with her—a mere half-blood Indian—and take her away from the reservation to the big cities of the East. She will believe anything, ignoring all evidence to the contrary. It is obvious to almost everyone around her—Jim LaGrinder, Stemteemä, the ranch hands, her sister Mary—that Densmore is a cad and that he wants only what she has, not what she is. Only her sister Julia, herself married to a white man, is fooled by Densmore and encourages Cogewea to stay with him. Why? Because Julia is convinced that "civilization" is "the only hope for the Indian" and wants her sister to "draw from the more favored and stronger, rather than to fall back to the unfortunate class so dependent on their conquerors for their very existence" (*Cogewea*, 274).

Cogewea seems to share such views. Just back from graduating with high honors from the Carlisle Indian School, she buys into the notion that the white way is the best way, a white husband better than an Indian husband. The Carlisle Indian School's only reason for existence was to take Indians out of their native culture and make them "white." Cogewea has internalized that goal: "'I would prefer living the white man's way'" (*Cogewea*, 41). It seems that she has as serious an image problem as Henry West had in *The Brand*. When she has a chance to hire a ranch hand, she specifically wants a "light haired" one (*Cogewea*, 38). The man she hires is a tenderfoot with no ranch experience; his only qualification is that he is white. Perhaps Cogewea is angry at the portrayal of the "breed" Henry West because she knows that she is so much like him. Perhaps, like him, she is ashamed of her Indianness and wishes she were all white and therefore worthy of Alfred Densmore or some other white husband.

Cogewea wants, more than anything else, to believe what is so patently not true: that Densmore loves her. The last thing she wants to read just then, only a few hours after his initial advances, is a novel in which the heroine is tricked by a white man like Densmore and, in the end, must settle in marriage for the less exciting mixed-blood Indian rancher. Reading the novel does not "tend toward calming her perturbed mind" (*Cogewea*, 88). "Instead of extending a helping hand" (*Cogewea*, 88), the novel makes Cogewea almost insanely angry; her "fury increased as she read"

(*Cogewea*, 88–89). When Jim comes up, she admits that the book makes her "'cross as a bear'" (*Cogewea*, 89), and she insults him by telling him, "'You are only an Injun!—a miserable *breed!*'" (*Cogewea*, 89). Jim's feelings are hurt, and he walks away in anger, leaving Cogewea, another "miserable breed," to fume on her own. Then, in a telling phrase, the narrator informs us that "Cogewea had not meant to be ugly to Jim when he interrupted her reading. She was out of humor and tried to blame it to the book. It was not suited to her ideals" (*Cogewea*, 90). What can those "ideals" be but the wish that she could be white and marry a white man? She misreads and rejects the novel because she does not like the messages it suggests: that she is foolish to trust a slick white easterner and that she is more likely to find happiness in the arms of a mixed-blood Indian rancher.

In her hasty "sketching" of the novel, Cogewea reads into the feelings of Henry West, in *The Brand*, a cursing hatred of his mother. Does that reading suggest that, at that very moment, wanting to be attractive to a white man, she herself feels stirrings of hatred for her own Indian mother? Perhaps not. Her mother died when she was very young, and she protests that she will "'*never* disown my mother's blood'" (*Cogewea*, 41). However, considering that she had just stated that she would prefer to live the white man's way, it seems psychologically consistent for Cogewea to superimpose her feelings of resentment about her mother's race onto the fictional character Henry West.

If I am right, then the real reason for Cogewea's angry rejection of *The Brand* has little to do with the book itself or with the critical principle of literary racism. It has to do, rather, with Cogewea's own sensitivity about being a half-blood and her hopes for escaping her Indianness through a white education and a white marriage. If I am right, Cogewea is less a reliable literary critic than a character who uses literary criticism to disguise her dissatisfaction with being a half-blood.

Of course, there are reasons for skepticism about my view of Cogewea's reading of *The Brand*. Are we really to believe that readers of Mourning Dove's novel would pick up these intertextual connections between *The Brand* and *Cogewea*? Perhaps not, but why else is *The Brand* mentioned by name in chapter 10, and why else is so much made of Cogewea's impassioned reaction to it? Are we really to believe that Cogewea misreads *The Brand* in a way consistent with her confused feelings about the inferiority of Indians? Perhaps not, but why else does she get so angry at so silly

a novel, and why else is she so eager to marry a man who has nothing to recommend him except that he is white? Are we really to believe that Cogewea identifies with what she sees as antimaternal feelings in a male character because she wants to deny her own Indian ancestry, her own Indian mother? Perhaps not, but why else would Mourning Dove have Cogewea come down so hard on Henry's supposed hatred of the mother he, in fact, loves and reverences? Are we really to believe that Cogewea criticizes *The Brand* for a largely imaginary racism? Perhaps not, but why else would Mourning Dove have Cogewea portray as racist a novel that, for all its Anglocentrism, is less racist than she makes it sound, and why else would Mourning Dove have Cogewea try to conceal from herself the assimilationist tendencies in her own troubled heart?

My view of Cogewea's misreading of *The Brand* is corroborated by her reaction to another story later in *Cogewea*: Stemteemä's story of her friend Green-blanket Feet in chapter 19. That story, one of the most memorable narrative units in the novel, has a clear message for Cogewea. It is a message, however, that she does not want to hear, a message similar to what she found in *The Brand*: that young Indian women cannot trust handsome, slick, white easterners. Green-blanket Feet, we recall, married a white man in an Indian ceremony and had two children by him. After several years, he left to go home to his white wife, taking the children with him. Green-blanket Feet followed but was cruelly mistreated by her white husband. On the journey, she tried to steal her children back and take them home with her, but he caught and beat her. Finally, in desperation, she stole away one of the children at night and tried to return to her people, but the child died on the journey home. Green-blanket Feet tells the story to Stemteemä, closing with this warning: "'Let the maidens of my tribe shun the Shoyahpee [white man]. His words are poison! his touch is death'" (*Cogewea*, 176). Not quite trusting Cogewea to get the point, Stemteemä specifically reinterprets the message to her granddaughter: "'Cogewea; you must be more careful of that Shoyahpee [Densmore]. I do not like to have you with him so much. You must quit going with him alone. It is against the rules of our race for a maiden to do so. You must stop it! He only seeks to harm you. The fate of Green-blanket Feet is for you . . . unless you turn from him'" (*Cogewea*, 176).

Cogewea's reaction to the story is anger: "Cogewea's ivory teeth closed firm and her tapering fingers dug into the shaggy

buffalo robe before she ventured self defense" (*Cogewea*, 176). She declares, "'The young bird flies more sprightly than do the old. The Shoyahpee girls go out with their men friends and nobody cares'" (*Cogewea*, 177–78). Wanting to be like the white girls and "fly more sprightly" than the old-style Indians, Cogewea rejects her grandmother's warning. Stemteemä cruelly reminds Cogewea that "'she is not full Shoyahpee. She is only half! She must forget her white blood and follow after her Okanogan ancestors'" (*Cogewea*, 177). Cogewea makes no oral response to that statement, but "she rebelled at the thought that she must not love the fair skinned Easterner too well" (*Cogewea*, 177). In rejecting the story of Green-blanket Feet, Cogewea repeats the response she had earlier had to *The Brand*. It is very much in character for Cogewea, when she does not like the message, to reject both the storyteller and the story that convey the message. We should recall that her own life had involved a story whose warning she had also ignored. Her white father, like Green-blanket Feet's husband, had used and then abandoned his Indian wife. Cogewea denies the relevance of such stories to her own situation until it is almost too late. At the end of the novel, however, she comes to see the relevance of all these stories to her own life, and she marries the half-blood Jim.

CONCLUSION

Cogewea, then, is less Mourning Dove's mouthpiece for criticizing racist fiction than a complex character whose too-simple reaction to a vapid novel tells us more about her than it does about the novel. Cogewea fails as a literary critic because she cannot see past the assimilationist racism she has herself internalized and because she refuses to take seriously the messages that stories can give her. The wiser literary critic here is Mourning Dove—that combination of an Indian writer and a white editor. She attacks *The Brand* less because it is racist than because it is simpleminded, but she is less interested in decrying simpleminded novels than in decrying unreflective readers like her own protagonist. Mourning Dove demonstrates that Cogewea can and must grow to a deeper understanding of herself and her relationship to narrative. Considered more broadly, the object of Mourning Dove's literary criticism is to encourage readers of all cultures to read more closely both their own fiction and that of other cultures, and to appreciate more fully the relevance of narrative to their own lives.

NOTES

1. It was preceded by Sophia Alice Callahan's novel *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* (Chicago: H.J. Smith, 1891) and by the fiction of Zitkala-Sa (Gertude Simmons Bonnin). Callahan, one-sixteenth Creek by blood, wrote about Creek Indians of Oklahoma. In the early 1900s, Zitkala-Sa, part Sioux, published several stories about the Sioux, which were later published as *American Indian Stories* (Washington, DC: Hayworth, 1921; reprinted Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

2. Mourning Dove was also known as Hum-ishu-ma and as Christal Quintasket McLeod Galler—the last three of these names being the surnames of her father and her two husbands. She had completed her work on the novel by 1916, but, because of World War I and problems getting a publisher, it was not published until eleven years later. The title of the first edition of Mourning Dove's novel was hyphenated *Co-ge-we-a,* but most subsequent editors and writers have changed the name, as I have done, to reflect the simplified spelling of the title character's name in the novel. The hyphenation of the title was apparently made by the publisher, the Four Seas Press of Boston. Page numbers for all quotations from the novel are taken from the facsimile edition with an introduction by Dexter Fisher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

3. Like virtually all Indian fiction writers, Mourning Dove is of mixed heritage. After a careful study of Mourning Dove's own statements, the official records, and *Cogewea,* Alanna Kathleen Brown reaches this ambiguous conclusion: "Mourning Dove was either one-quarter or one-half Caucasian. She was born between 1882 and 1888. She may be Okanogan, Colville (Schwelpi) and/or Lake, and Irish, in descent." I quote from her "Mourning Dove's Canadian Recovery Years, 1917–19," *Canadian Literature* 24 (1990): 113–14.

4. Published in Seattle by the Alice Harriman Company. I have been able to discover almost nothing about Therese Broderick except what can be inferred from the novel itself: that she knew well the terrain surrounding the Flathead Reservation in western Montana, that she knew more about cowboys than about Indians, and that she was, by almost any measure, a second-rate writer. In one of the very few contemporary reviews of the novel, we learn that Broderick "lives on the shore of Flathead Lake, and has studied her setting and her characters at first hand" (*New York Times Book Review,* 29 January 1910). The name Tin Schreiner appears in parentheses after the name Therese Broderick on the title page, which may indicate that Broderick is the author's pen name. On the following page is this poem, attributed to Tin Schreiner:

To all who know the Golden West,
And those who fain would feel
Its charm and mystery, and test
Its worth, which is so real;
To all who love God's mountains,
His vast expanse of plain,
His forests, lakes and fountains,

And the secrets they contain—
This book is humbly given.

An advertisement for *The Brand* at the start of Alice Harriman's own novel, *A Man of Two Countries* (Seattle: Alice Harriman Co., 1910), identifies *The Brand* as a "first novel by a new writer." No other novel by either Therese Broderick or TIn Schreiner was ever published. All page references to *The Brand* are to the first and only edition (Seattle: Alice Harriman Co., 1909).

5. See, for example, Jay Miller, *Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), xvii: Mourning Dove's "efforts seem to have been framed by her reaction to *The Brand*, a novel set among the Flatheads; Mourning Dove's work had a similar plot but a more sympathetic viewpoint." Miller's article "Mourning Dove: Editing in All Directions to 'Get Real,'" in *SAIL* 7.2 (Summer 1995): 65–72, appeared too late to be given more than brief acknowledgment here. Miller puts forth some interesting biographical speculation—that Mourning Dove was born in 1884, four years earlier than has usually been assumed, and that her claims to have had a white grandfather were most likely false.

6. For a convenient recent discussion of modern "Indian romance" novels, see the article I wrote with some of my students, "The Contemporary Indian Romance: A Review Essay" in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 15 (1991): 97–125. The article gives summaries of seventeen paperback Indian romances published in 1990, along with small reproductions of their covers.

7. Quoted from page xv of Dexter Fisher's introduction to the University of Nebraska Press edition (1981).

8. She attended a convent school through the third grade and later worked as a matron at a government Indian school. Not long before she wrote *Cogewea*, she enrolled in a business college in Calgary, where she studied typing and English. Nothing in this educational process would have given her the strangely Latinate vocabulary and the unnatural sentence structures that characterize McWhorter's style.

9. Virtually every critic who has commented on *Cogewea* has noted the confused mixture of voices in the novel, and virtually every critic castigates McWhorter for his heavy-handed meddling with text. Typical is Rayna Green's remark (*Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1 [1982]: 217): "McWhorter's use of *Cogewea* to air his anger about the 'plight of the red man,' however sincere, intrudes on the language and atmosphere of Mourning Dove's book. Stilted, rhetorical and argumentative, he has Cogewea and others express very real feelings in an impossible and false language." The best discussion of this whole question of voice is to be found in Alanna Kathleen Brown's "Mourning Dove's Voice in *Cogewea*," *Wicazo Sa Review* 4 (1988): 2–15. Brown concludes, "However much McWhorter edited or embellished the text, the story is hers" (p. 11). "Is the book literarily flawed?" Brown asks. "Yes. McWhorter intruded again and again even to the extent of claiming Cogewea's voice for ethnographic input and cries of outrage againsts a corrupt B.I.A. and a hypocritical Christian

nation. Did he override Mourning Dove's voice in *Cogewea*? No. In its essence, the book is hers" (p. 13). Brown gives a useful list of others who have discussed the confused voice of the novel, but no one has addressed the special problem of voice in chapter 10. I am grateful to Alanna Brown for her helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

10. To readers persuaded by the poststructuralist ideas of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, the whole notion of an author is problematical. Those interested in trying to grasp the nature of the problem might start with Donald E. Pease, "The Author," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 105–17 and its bibliography.

11. It is interesting that one of the many small errors in *Cogewea* comes in the second sentence of the first chapter: "The last rays of the day-God, glinting through the tangled vines screening the great porch of the homestead of the Horseshoe Brand Ranch, fell upon a face of rare type." The name of the ranch is the Horseshoe Bend, not Brand. Perhaps the error can be explained as an unconscious reference to Broderick's novel. On one level, of course, the "Brand" may refer to the natural branding of skin color, as in "The Brand of Cain." In the second sentence after the one just quoted, in any case, there is a reference to Cogewea's "rich olive complexion" (*Cogewea*, 15).

12. Nor is Mourning Dove herself above animal comparisons. The name Cogewea means "chipmunk" (*Cogewea*, 49), for example, and Mourning Dove uses far more negative animal images to describe whites than Broderick does to describe Indians. Green-blanket Feet, for example, hates her white husband as she hates "a reptile in the dust" (*Cogewea*, 168), and he is said to have a tongue "like that of a serpent" (*Cogewea*, 170). Alfred Densmore is repeatedly called a snake, most often by Indian characters (see *Cogewea*, 229, 248, 250, 265, 271, 274). He is compared with other unpleasant creatures as well, such as a coyote (*Cogewea*, 249) and a vulture (*Cogewea*, 271).