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Redefining the Frontier: Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range*

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At the same time that the genteelly raised Pauline Johnson explored mixed-blood identity in wide-ranging performance tours of Canada and Europe, the less privileged writer Mourning Dove, in her novel *Cogewea, The Half-Blood*, did the same more locally from the inland Northwest. A member of the first generation of Colvilles to be raised on a reservation, Mourning Dove had determined to write a book "for her people, for herself, and for the Euro-Americans who understood so little about those they had conquered."[1] She completed the first draft of *Cogewea* in 1914.[2] Set on a ranch in the frontier of turn-of-the-century Montana—a site of contestation between Native Americans, ranchers, and homesteaders—the novel tells the tale of its half-white, half-Okanogan heroine Cogewea, wooed for her money by the white easterner Densmore.

Now best known as the first female Native American novelist, with the publication of *Cogewea* in 1927 Mourning Dove "announced explicitly what was to become the dominant theme in novels by Indian authors: the dilemma of the mixed

Cathryn Halverson has just completed her dissertation for the University of Michigan—"Autobiography, Genius, and the American West: The Stories of Mary MacLane and Opal Whiteley."

blood, the liminal 'breed' seemingly trapped between Indian and white worlds."[3] Despite the prejudice that her text records, Mourning Dove herself refused more privileged full-blood status to avow a white ancestor: In claiming literal mixed blood, she claimed authority to speak for the sense of double inheritance and double displacement that she herself obviously experienced, white blood or no.[4] Mourning Dove's text, moreover, is itself "mixed." Through Okanogan tales adapted to address the contemporary issue of white contact, Mourning Dove incorporates traditional storytelling culture within her western novel; she also manipulates a "recurring motif of spirit power" to transform "the most fundamental belief of the Okanogans ... into an organic element of the plot."[5] Organized around what first appears to be a stereotypical melodramatic plot, *Cogewea* is at once both a sincere attempt at a formula western and an ironic reworking of the genre from the perspective of a woman and a Native American. As Peter G. Beidler suggests, Mourning Dove literally rewrites an earlier western, Therese Broderick's *The Brand: A Tale of the Flathead Reservation* (1909).[6] Beidler states, "It is almost as if [Mourning Dove] 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.'"[7] Transforming the white, eastern, convent-educated, Harvard-connected heroine of *The Brand* into Cogewea, Mourning Dove replaces the perspective of the Easterner who relocates to the West with that of a "native" Westerner, in both senses of the word.[8]

Seeking to counter racist depictions of the "despised breed" (17), in *Cogewea* Mourning Dove declares an essential connection between mixed bloods and the frontier, that ephemeral slice of territory so valorized in American history, literature, and popular culture. In so doing, she redefines the meaning of frontier itself, refuting the dominant conception of the frontier both as a time and place of nostalgic memory that regrettably is always past, "closed," and as an arena identified by the character-building adventures that white men play out against a backdrop of Indians. Texts such as Cooper's Leatherstocking tales and Owen Wister's *The Virginian* rendered the frontier the domain—albeit now vanished—of the "American Adam," the questing Anglo-Saxon male. In his exploration of the imaginary territory that these texts and others carved out, Richard Slotkin explains:

> [T]he Myth of the Frontier relates the achievement of "progress" to a particular form or scenario of violent action.... [It] represented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or "natural" state, and *regeneration through violence*.[9]

Women or Native Americans are significant in this myth only as instruments through which the white hero develops and manifests his natural superiority, as in Wister's prototypical western in which the aristocratic Virginian triumphs over Molly, the uppity schoolteacher. Typical of western writers, Wister declares such a triumph no longer possible, contending that even if one traveled to the land in which *The Virginian* is set, "you would stand at the heart of the world that is the subject of my picture, yet you would look around in vain for the reality. It is a vanished world."[10]

Mourning Dove actually learned to read from western "penny-dreadfuls." In her own western text, though, she contests the mythic version to assert that instead of a racially pure, exclusively masculine, bygone space, the frontier is a mixed space still very much present and home to women as well as men. Running counter to the American literary assertion that it is the "white man without a cross" who dominates the frontier,[11] Mourning Dove presents its natural inhabitants as the "breeds," the mixed bloods who participate in both Native American and white cultures while at the same time creating cultures of their own. The colon's linkage of the two halves of the novel's title is striking, asserting that a "depiction" of the Montana range is necessarily a "depiction" of Cogewea. The text as a whole affirms what its title declares: the range, neither wilderness nor "civilization," is the proper locale for Cogewea, neither Indian nor white. As the title suggests, moreover, Mourning Dove redefines the frontier in gendered as well as racial terms, in that it is her text's female protagonist whom she depicts as the mixed blood most attuned to the social and geographical western landscape. In this regard, Mourning Dove resembles other early twentieth-century western women writers such as Willa Cather, Mary Austin, and Mary MacLane who challenge the "overdetermined" relationship between "what is male and what is western."[12]

In contrast to *Cogewea*'s mixed-blood characters, who are at home in their frontier environment even if their origins are

elsewhere, it is the "full bloods" whom the text portrays as displaced, including the white Easterner Densmore and Cogewea's grandmother Stemteemä. In response to Densmore's disappointment over the range's paucity of full bloods, a ranch hand explains that "th' gen-u-ine article" is to be found only on the reservation (44). Even the text's two aristocrats, the wealthy Parisian Frenchy and Cogewea's sister Mary—who primarily identifies with traditional Okanogan culture despite her mixed blood—are removed at the text's end to Europe, a setting more appropriate to such "courtly" individuals than the hybrid range.[13] Mourning Dove takes her refiguration of the concept of frontier to its furthest logical extreme. If the frontier is the place at which white meets Indian, then the mixed blood who both literally and in spirit embodies that meeting is its most fit inhabitant and, indeed, is that which constitutes the frontier in the first place.

In *Cogewea*, Mourning Dove counters the mixed bloods' "despised" status by aligning them with the valorized territory of the frontier. In so doing, though, she also challenges notions of the frontier's "regenerative" powers, in that by the novel's end she depicts the frontier as an arena not only of freedom or growth, but also one of constriction imaged as the "corral" to which Cogewea and her mixed-blood fiancé Jim resign themselves. *Cogewea* "ends on a note of stasis," as Louis Owens notes,[14] due to both Mourning Dove's familiarity with the racism accorded the mixed blood and her knowledge that as one torn between two cultures, the "breed's" displacement and ambivalence are not easily to be resolved. The text centers around the question of whom Cogewea should marry, but unlike so many novels that conclude with happy marriages, Mourning Dove makes it clear that Cogewea's eventual union with Jim is not a final or even partial solution to her dilemmas.

The novel's concluding image of its mixed-blood couple as "corralled" makes an appropriate image for the text itself, in that within it Mourning Dove's own voice is constricted by the additions and revisions of her editor Lucullus McWhorter, whom she met, significantly enough, at a Frontier Days Celebration in Washington state.[15] With little access to a white-dominated literary establishment and as a speaker of English as a second language, unquestionably Mourning Dove needed significant assistance in order to publish *Cogewea*. Beyond editing the text and adding a preface, notes, and epigraphs,

though, McWhorter inserted lengthy passages reflecting his own research, with the intent of "reaffirm[ing]" *Cogewea's* "Indian point of view" and educating the reader about the customs of various tribes.[16] The letter that Mourning Dove sent McWhorter on first seeing the completed text is reproachful and even sarcastic in tone: "I have just got through going over the book *Cogeawea*, and am 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 sure was interested in the book.... I felt like it was some one elses book and not mine at all. In fact the finishing touches are put there by you, and I have never seen it."[17]

McWhorter's "tasty dressing" not only overstepped the bounds of editorial propriety, but, more important, counters Mourning Dove's own assertions. *Cogewea* itself is a site of contestation over how the West and the frontier are to be depicted. Whereas Mourning Dove validates the contact of cultures and the position of the mixed blood as such, McWhorter decries them. In a telling discussion of music, for example, he depicts the mixing of elements of traditional and western dance as the very reverse of laudable cultural adaptation: "See those young men! Their slouchy *'traipsing'* tells of contact with the meaningless 'waltz' and suggestive 'hugs' and 'trots' of the higher civilization—a vulgarity—a sacrilegous [*sic*] burlesque on an ancient and religiously instituted ceremony" (75).[18] Moreover, McWhorter contradicts Mourning Dove by affirming popular understanding of the frontier as extant only in memory, an erstwhile kingdom not of the mixed blood and certainly not of women, but rather of the white cowboy. Through the verses with which he heads each chapter of the novel, mostly selections from Longfellow's "Hiawatha" and various poems by Badger Clark, McWhorter depicts the frontier as the province solely of two rigorously distinct groups of male cowboys and Indians, groups that have either passed or are passing away due to the arrival of an emasculated civilization. The Clark verse with which McWhorter closes the novel laments:

> The trail's a lane! The trail's a lane
> Dead is the branding fire.
> The prairies wild are tame and mild,
> All close-corralled with wire. (285)

Clark queries,

How comes it, pard of mine?
Within a day it slipped away
And hardly left a sign. (47)

McWhorter continually strikes this note of nostalgia; indeed, he suggests in his preface to the text that *Cogewea* is in essence an elegy for cowboy life, concluding "[Mourning Dove's] characters are all from actual life, and throughout the narrative, she has endeavored to picture the period as she actually saw it—an Indian—on the closing days of the great cattle range, and the decadence of its King, the *cowpuncher*" (12).

In contrast with McWhorter's preoccupation with the past stands Mourning Dove's concern for the present, for the lot of the people created by the meeting of Native Americans and whites. For Mourning Dove, the frontier is a complex and dynamic arena that one must at present discern how to live within, one that not only includes McWhorter's cowboys and Indians, but Indians as cowboys and even cowgirls as cowboys as Indians. Mourning Dove undermines western stereotypes from within by working in the very genre, the western, that had done so much to create them. In taking such a symbolically freighted region as her subject, however, she attracted interference from an editor who perceived her text as echoing the familiar story. The text's tensions between writer and editor can be read less as a struggle between Indian and white than as conflict between a representation of the West based on lived western experience and a representation preserved in the myth of the frontier.

Whereas Leslie Fiedler, in his well-known argument in *The Return of the Vanishing American*, defines a western as a text in which men go west in order to find freedom from women,[19] Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* reverses this scenario. In her novel, the West offers men independence not via such mythically classic western pursuits as mining, ranching, or business, but through marriage to landed western women—whether Native American women with allotments or homesteading "school marms." Far from going west to "grow up with the country," in *Cogewea* ambitious young men go west to make a moneyed match: "'Out here from Noo York, Chicago and Omyhaw, they're huntin' lonely school marms with payin' homesteads'" (196). Densmore reveals his evil nature in part by his pursuit of Cogewea for her supposed wealth in land and stock, but throughout the text various ranch hands are urged to similar

courses, even by Cogewea herself.[20]

In posing the prospect of ranch hands marrying and starting their own ranches, thereby neutralizing the homesteaders' threat, Mourning Dove predicates an essentially unchanged continuation of ranch life. She does so as well with the remark, "[John Carter] hoped some day that his foreman would become a junior partner of the 'H-B' brand" (19). Such calm, though, does not indicate that Mourning Dove is unaware of changes taking place in the region. She mentions that Carter's ranch now runs less stock due to the multiplying Missourians who first began arriving when the reservation was opened to homesteaders; she also alludes to a bygone western past in noting that Jim's horse once belonged to the Wild West show that memorialized the "real" West (28) and that Jim himself "half wished that he might leave the region now so rapidly being settled.... Arizona flashed through his mind!" (237). Yet Mourning Dove's attitude towards the curtailment of cattle mirrors Cogewea's disinterest, which she reveals by her response to the ranchers' conversation about the homesteaders: "There has always been friction between the unpretentious homesteaders and the larger stockmen. Uninterested in this topic, Cogewea took a seat apart" (33). Like her protagonist, in *Cogewea* Mourning Dove is less concerned by the settlers' threat to ranching than she is by the displacement of Native Americans and destruction of the "wilderness" to which ranching itself contributed. Indeed, Mourning Dove describes even the "H-B" ranch house as "constructed on allotted Indian lands" and displaying a buffalo head "trophy" upon which "Cogewea never looked ... without a pang of regret" (31). Cogewea is both fond of the ranch and the ranch culture it enables, and pained by its cost.

In the text, Cogewea alone suffers such ambivalence. Apparently without inner conflict, her sister Julia has chosen to identify herself with her husband's white culture and her sister Mary with her grandmother's Okanogan one. Jim and some of the other ranch hands are shown to be mixed culturally as well as racially, but little troubled by the mix (although while helping Mary build the sweat house, Jim does exclaim that he "'Hadn't thought of no sweat house for years till today. Maybe been tryin' too hard to be Shoyahpee, dam' 'em!'" [242]). In contrast, the text throughout portrays Cogewea as both psychically disturbed by the internal conflict she experiences as a "breed" and frustrated "within the narrow limits of her prescribed sphere" (22). Describing mixed bloods as "just a go-

between people, shut within their own diminutive world" (41), *Cogewea*'s depiction of the open range abounds with images of enclosure.

Cogewea's constricted arena and outcast status are emblematized by the refusal of both the white and the Kootenai women to recognize her—neither lady nor squaw—as a legitimate contender in their respective Fourth of July races. Despite her anger over such racism, Cogewea herself to some degree has internalized it. After reading *The Brand*—which Cogewea declares "'does nothing but slam the *breeds!*"—she exclaims to Jim "'I almost hate myself today!'" and in turn attacks him: "'*You* are no good! along with all the rest of us. You are only an Injun!—a miserable *breed!*—not higher than the dust on your white brothers' feet! Go away!'" (89).[21] Despite this flash of self-hatred and Cogewea's more usual ambivalence, however, the text generally depicts Cogewea's mixed origins as a source of strength, grace, and charisma.

Particularly through Cogewea's facility with language, Mourning Dove demonstrates both her protagonist's "mixed" status and the easeful cultural negotiation this status bestows. Countering representations of the stereotypically taciturn western male, the text repeatedly demonstrates the privileged place that speech holds in Cogewea's sphere: two men fight viciously when they each think the other is mocking his stutter; the cowboys communicate through teasing one another and boasting of their skills; Frenchy is greeted with derision for his inability to speak clearly; Silent Bob is characterized by the effort it takes for him to speak (although he nevertheless speaks at length); Cogewea and Jim banter endlessly, and "the foreman joyed in these wordy tilts" (195). It is Cogewea herself, though, who principally illustrates the centrality of language on the range. A "'dam' good win' jammer'" (42), Cogewea masterfully wields the multiplicity of linguistic codes characteristic of a frontier arena, where "at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born."[22] Cogewea's facility with language stands in contrast to Densmore's inability even to pronounce her or the Stemteemä's name, as he stammers "Cage-Cogewea" (92); "Stem—Stem-tam—your grandmother" (116).[23] The various "codes" between which Cogewea alternates,[24] often with ironic inflection, include standard English, Okanogan, Chinook, ranch slang, Latinate musings, and, perhaps most strikingly, her and Jim's slangy speech, with its references to squaws, tomahawks, the war path,

and other stereotypical Indian markers—the two act their parts with gusto. Jim expresses the effect of Cogewea's verbal adroitness: "By gollies! little squ—Cogewea. You'r 'bout the queerest I ever saw. Sometimes you talk nice and fine, then next time maybe yo go ramblin' just like some preacher-woman or schoolmarm. Can't always savey you" (33). The ultimate "breed," Cogewea is bewilderingly multilingual.

In accord with Cogewea's particular identity as a mixed blood, Mourning Dove portrays the girl as closely tied to her western landscape. Even the obtuse Densmore associates Cogewea with the natural world, imagining that "that 'breed' girl... peeped from every flower; those flashing black eyes reflected from the pebbles glinting in the sunshine. Her tresses streamed on the eddying current, and her voice was in the notes of bird-song and the chipmunk's chatter" (80). At another moment, Densmore observes that Cogewea's "form was cast in sharp silhouette against a limpid sky-line, where it appeared as much in place as when in saddle" (142). Spending her days galloping back and forth across the land, in the evenings Cogewea sits high on a favorite butte, viewing the sunset and the land spread out before her with a proprietary eye. On receiving a letter from an eastern friend she articulates her attachment, explaining to Jim that "'sometimes I long to go back [east], but I cannot leave these splendid plains and mountains that I love so well.'" Apparently troubled by the claim this bond implies, Jim protests, "'You talk like these here cactus-grown sand-sweeps and piled-up rocks was your private and individual property; and—'" but Cogewea interrupts him to declare:

> "When man was created it was said to him, if I remember correctly, 'This is your soil. Till it and earn your daily food,' and I think that I have a right to claim a part of the land, even without a man-written patent to it. But if it troubles you, then in word only will I assert my just title to the scenery thereof. Savey?" (32-33)

Speaking from the assumption that her gender in no way excludes her from the biblical promise, with compelling conviction Cogewea invokes the authority of scripture to legitimate her "claim." Mourning Dove also reminds the reader that Cogewea's eighty-acre allotment makes her title to the land literal as well as spiritual.

As with her language skills, Mourning Dove portrays

Cogewea's free access to the outdoors as a legacy of her mixed heritage. Cogewea was raised in a teepee by her Okanogan grandmother, and during the years under her care she

> made long strolls into the bordering mountains. These run-away-trips were not unattended with danger and consequently were a source of considerable solicitude on the part of the old grandparent. Unlike other children, the repeated warnings that *Sne-nah* would catch her, had no effect. Contrary to all precedent, the little "breed" defied this dreaded devourer of children by extending her rambles farther and still farther into the luring wilderness. (16)

On the one hand, Mourning Dove presents these trips as an outgrowth of Cogewea's traditional upbringing, in that "life in the open, the sweat house and cold river baths, had stamped [her and her sisters'] every fiber with bounding vitality"; Cogewea is a "little 'woods-savage'" (16). On the other hand, it is Cogewea's distance from traditional Okanogan culture that enables such behavior "contrary to all precedent," since due to their belief in *Sne-nah*, Mourning Dove suggests, full-blood girls would not dare attempt the excursions of "the little 'breed.'" At a later point in the text, Cogewea herself declares that it is only her mixed blood that enables her to kill a rattlesnake, invoking her Okanogan heritage to justify the killing since the snake has "'*tahmahnawis* power for doing secret evil to the people,'" and justifying it by her white ancestry as well: "'Besides, I happen to know of the machinations of one of your progenitors in a certain garden several thousand snows ago.... An ancient book contains a law wherein is said something about a woman a bustin' your durned head; and *I* am that *woman*.'" She declaims to the snake, "'Your "medicine" is strong and my grandmother would not hurt you. But *I* am *not* my grandmother! I am not a full-blood—only a *breed*—a *sitkum* Injun and that breaks the charm of your magic with me. I do not fear you!'" (26).

In depicting Cogewea's special relation to her frontier environment as arising from her status as the most mixed of all the text's characters, Mourning Dove locates Cogewea at not only a racial but also a gendered crossroad. *Cogewea* refutes Jane Tompkins' characterization of western texts as those in which "the gender system works to enforce codes of behavior that are ... excruciating."[25] Again, it is the snake scene that best dramatizes not only Cogewea's mixed blood but also her "mixed"

gender. In this scene, Mourning Dove caricatures the quick-drawing gunfighter hero of western fiction: "Her hand shot out, followed by an explosion and the vibrating rattles flew into atoms. She continued.... 'No you don't!' as cowed, the rattler uncoiled and began to glide away. 'I will not spoil your handsome mug, but just'—bang—'decapitate you'" (26). Afterwards, "woman-like, the tears came" (28), not out of remorse for her aggressive behavior but from mortification over her fall; fearful of losing her place in the ranch hierarchy in which status is determined by riding skill, Cogewea pleads with Jim not to disclose that she was thrown from her horse.

Mourning Dove often marks her heroine as feminine. Cogewea is beautiful and emotional, and as a woman a moral superior on the ranch; the men "worshipped this free, wild girl of the range, whose word with them was law" (279). In her behavior, though, Cogewea is most unladylike. She not only kills the snake in a self-aggrandizing display, but also rides rough, boasts, and, since "no prudishness marked the movements of this strange, self-reliant girl" (18), displays a degree of familiarity with the male hands that shocks outsiders. When Cogewea approached Densmore to introduce herself, "At this freedom, the tenderfoot had nearly toppled from his seat with astonishment. He had yet to learn the ways of a plain's [*sic*] cowgirl. An introduction on the range might be in keeping among the more conventional whites, but at the 'H-B' such formality was unknown" (49). Cogewea's casual manners, which would not be condoned at the ranches of conventional whites, derive not from her western ranch locale alone but rather are characteristic of behavior at the mixed-blood "range idyl" of the "H-B" ranch (31).

In depicting the free interaction with men that Cogewea so enjoys, Mourning Dove shows that just as no white lady could be forgiven such behavior, neither could a full-blood Okanogan; the latitude allowed Cogewea derives from her mixed status. Cogewea explains to Densmore that in traditional Okanogan culture:

> "a young unmarried woman must sit, if occasion demanded, on her feet in her parent's teepee from morning until nightfall. Aside from her immediate relatives, no man must ever see her ankles. Should this at anytime happen, the girl was given to the man for nothing. Considered of no future

> value, she became a reproach to her family.... she was disgraced." (98-99)

Even as the "forward girl" (99) regrets the passing of traditional culture, her language here indicates her aversion to some of its proscriptions on women's actions. Whereas her sister Mary—a girl of "Indian coyness and modesty of manner"—"had often been embarrassed by [Cogewea's] independence of action and speech" (43), her unconventional behavior with men occasions Cogewea herself no discomfort or moments of self-doubt. Cogewea is surefooted in her negotiation between Okanogan and white sexual mores. When the Stemteemä scolds her for her familiarity with Densmore, for example, Cogewea is not abashed by her transgression but instead merrily translates the reproof to Densmore and soon placates her grandmother (99). Neither does the text suggest that Cogewea's attempted elopement subsequently causes her to feel like a fallen or even an improper woman.

Mourning Dove does insist, however, that despite the fact that her heroine does not behave traditionally, at heart she is in perfect accord with a culture that criticizes "loose" female conduct in tales such as that about "*Swa-lah-kin* the 'frog woman,'" who by "odious[ly]" flirting with the sun makes him "hate her so badly" as to cause terrible storms (159-160). The text repeatedly testifies to Cogewea's innate virtue. "Coquettishly blind" (19), even after agreeing to marry Densmore Cogewea rebuffs all physical contact, refusing even to be kissed; likewise, with her chilling reproofs she thoroughly intimidates the various hands who attempt liberties. Mourning Dove compares Cogewea's facility in handling men with her treks into the mountains, another legacy of her mixed heritage: "She commanded [the cowboys'] respect as but few women of her blood could command it.... She understood the 'beast' in man and how to subdue it with the same daring confidence which had characterized her younger days of mountain riding" (17). As one born to the frontier, Cogewea incorporates in her behavior elements of both the old and new, enjoying physical and social freedom but remaining as pure as any zealously guarded Okanogan maiden.

Yet, although her dual inheritance affords her grace socially, Cogewea has difficulty in finding a place in life. "An ambitious girl" (16-17), Cogewea's "impulse was to be going, going, going" (22); she has vague ambitions to "fill [a] sphere of use-

fulness" and "equip herself for a useful career" (17). With her profound ties to the land, however, she is unable to imagine living away from the mountains and valleys of the northwestern range, despite the fact that the range offers few prospects to her as a woman and a "breed." Cogewea works indoors, helping her sister with the cooking, housework, and child care. Not being the wife and mother herself, she occupies a subordinate position, and anyhow Cogewea has no special domestic skills in need of an outlet—she is not described as a demon in the kitchen, for example, or as having a winning way with children. Cogewea is far more suited to outdoor work: her tricks and jokes, boasting, and general participation in cowboy camaraderie establish her as an insider to ranch hand society, and in horsemanship "but few of the boys could surpass her" (23). Yet, although Mourning Dove may dub her a "plain's cowgirl," Cogewea's sex excludes her from actual work with stock. The ritualistic Fourth of July races aside, she can turn her riding skill only to errands or personal pleasure, and the men treat as a joke the idea of Cogewea having a formal position at the ranch: "'Maybe I will create you foreman, when Jim becomes my partner.' Cogewea caught the wink that was intended for Jim only, and the mantling blood suffused her olive cheek to a darker hue" (39). Since Cogewea is unable both to work on the range and to tear herself from it, it is through marriage that she hopes to wrest control of her destiny, and the text centers around the issue of which man she will choose.

Cogewea's distance from traditional Okanogan culture allows her to select her own mate. Although Jim rues that "'the white man's law permits her to choose between [Densmore and him], nor can tribal rules interfere'" (227), the text itself does not regret such permission. Its absence would bear hard with the independent spirit for which it lauds Cogewea; more generally, through the story about the Stemteemä's betrayed aunt, Mourning Dove demonstrates that the arrival of the whites has made choosing husbands for the women of the tribe potentially disastrous. At the same time, though, she maintains that a woman should attend the advice of family and friends in her choice of a husband, answering negatively the question that Densmore poses to Cogewea in cajoling her to marry him: "'is it not the inalienable right, as recognized in all reason, for every one to choose their own path in life?'" (252). *Cogewea* asserts that its mixed-blood protagonist needs to make her decisions both within the framework of community approval

and, even more important, in accord with the urging of her "spirit-power." At the text's end, Cogewea is shown as finally taking the right path in heeding the buffalo skull's endorsement of Jim, "'*The Man!*'" (282), after earlier having erred in ignoring counsel against elopement with Densmore: "'My Indian Spirit tells me that I am stepping wrong....But my white blood calls me to see the world—to do—to live—I—I —Oh'" (253).[26]

For Cogewea, Densmore is so compelling that even her Indian Spirit cannot turn her from him. The text portrays the exotic appeal of "this polite and polished Shoyahpee" (263), "the pleasing Easterner" (250), as deriving not from his race itself but from the upper-class status that his race makes possible. "Fresh from a great eastern city" and "'a scion of the ancient house of Densmore,'" the so-called "Mr. Alfred of the 'circle'" (87) appears to offer Cogewea a means towards satisfying her nebulous desires, fascinating her by the very refinement that makes him incongruous on the ranch (43, 87). In this respect, having been educated in the East and "passed through the mill of social refinement," "the Carlisle maiden" herself is distinct from the rest of her sphere (17, 19).[27] She envisions, then, in a future with Densmore the realization of her fantasy of private, genteel, middle-class life, so unlike the rough, communal, labor-oriented life at the ranch:

> Perhaps after all she was to come into the life she had oft-times pictured—a home—a husband who loved books and who would appreciate her efforts at making their domicile a place of endearment and happiness. Refined, he was so particular about his dress and he never ate with his knife, where, in the free, wild range, table manners were given but slight consideration. (137)

Mourning Dove goes on to deflate this domestic fantasy, however, showing how little such a scenario actually would appeal to Cogewea: "Somehow she wished that he could throw a rope like Jim—and—swear a bit on provocation. Perhaps he would learn" (137).

Through the issue of whom Cogewea should marry, Mourning Dove illustrates the full complexity of racial identity and relations for the mixed bloods on the frontier. Although a prominent theme in the text is that of the betrayal of Indian women by white men, Mourning Dove complicates the issue in

that she does not simply declare that Indian women should never marry white men. On the contrary, it is on just such a marriage that the "range idyl" of the "H-B" is founded, in that Cogewea's sister Julia is happily married to the white John Carter. Mourning Dove portrays Frenchy and Mary's eventual marriage, as well, as a befitting match. Her text does insist, however, that although white men might be suitable for some, Cogewea herself must have a mixed-blood husband. As Cogewea explains to Densmore, "'My field of conquest is a limited one.... To my own kind: the breed'" (149). Complicating the issue further, Cogewea's appropriate mate is only a man whose Native blood is, literally, quite visible. Two of the ranch hands, themselves mixed bloods, maintain that Jim's darker skin betters his odds of winning Cogewea. "Rodeo Jack," a "quarter-blood Texan of uncertain qualities" (34), asserts "'if Jim lan's her, it's cause of his more Injun 'plection as well as blood-'finity. Some times them there high toned 'breed' gals are fer harnisin' up with th'r own kin'.'" Celluloid Bill, half-Cheyenne, concurs: "'Jim's th' main guy an' it must be 'count his shade bein' a little darker'n mine'" (35). Despite the fact that Jim's "Injun 'plection" serves his suit, though, the text never suggests the possibility of Cogewea marrying a full-blood Indian. Even the Stemteemä does not propose such a marriage, but instead tells Cogewea, "'If you marry in your own class, the mixed blood, I will gladly bless you with the Great Indian Spirit'" (250). The woman of mixed blood is not offered the option of going "back" (274).

Cogewea's essential mixedness, which demands for her a mixed-blood husband, is analogous to the text's own incorporation of elements of both Native and white nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary tradition. William Bevis contends that white-authored American texts center on "leaving" plots that "are directed toward a new mode of life," in which "the individual advances, sometimes at all cost, with little or no regard for family, society, past or place. The individual is the ultimate reality." In contrast, he explains, "In Native American novels, coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call 'regressing' to a place, is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good."[28] In portraying the yearning, restless Cogewea, who makes a necessary psychic return home even as she remains discontented, Mourning Dove's novel engages both the "leaving" and the "homing" plots. These plots coexist in the text in an uneasy state of irresolution, making for a kind

of structural irony that dramatizes the mixed bloods' ambivalence towards the values of the dominant culture. The text does offer the shadow of a suggestion that Cogewea might find her place some day in writing a book defending the Okanogans.[29] At the text's end, however, Cogewea's sense of being bound by "her prescribed sphere" (22) is just as strong as it was at its beginning, as the very conversation that determines her entirely apt marriage to Jim reveals. Cogewea exclaims to her suitor, "'We despised *breeds* are in a zone of our own and when we break from the corral erected about us, we meet up with trouble. I only wish that the fence could not be scaled by the soulless creatures who have every preyed upon us'" (283). Jim eagerly embraces Cogewea's corral metaphor to propose: "'S'pose we remain together in that there corral you spoke of as bein built 'round us by the Shoyahpee?....the best rider of the Flathead ain't a worryin' 'bout this durn' old world no more!'" (283-284).

Earlier in the text, Mourning Dove had already pointed towards the novel's concluding stasis in allowing Densmore to escape the West unscathed. According to Slotkin, "achievement of 'progress.... and *regeneration through violence*"[30] is an essential component of the myth of the frontier. This myth has conditioned us to expect that since Densmore has robbed, beaten, and finally abandoned Cogewea, he will receive his just deserts. Mourning Dove denies this plot its consummation, however, since politically her mixed-blood characters are in no position to punish Densmore. When she hears the ranch hands planning vengeance:

> Cogewea overruled the violent measure, by pointing out the fallacy of any attempt at reprisal.... they being mere "breed Injuns", any extreme measures on their part would not be countenanced, and for the same reason an appeal to the courts looking to justice, would be of little or no avail. She showed them that because of the relative social standing of the two races, there were devious ways by which the Shoyahpee would be able to escape merited punishment. She finally persuaded them to forego all thoughts of pursuit, but there was a scowl on each dark face as they turned homeward. (279)

In following its own logic in its depiction of western mixed-blood existence, *Cogewea* must refuse the ranch hands—and the readers—the violence that feels so necessary.

This said, however, Mourning Dove does accord Densmore

poetic justice in allowing him to discover that Cogewea, whom he pursued for her money until discovering she had none, had inherited a fortune. Similarly, despite the betrothed pair's grim imagery of defeat and withdrawal in their engagement conversation, the text as a whole asserts that literally, at least, Cogewea ends up where she needs to be. Being in the right place is more essential to Cogewea's well-being than any kind of career or middle-class eastern gentility, as she indicates in exclaiming to Densmore:

> These are my prairies, my mountains, my Eden. I could live here always! I shall hate to leave them when the final summons comes.... When away, I grow lonesome, as a child for its mother. I become heart-sick for a sight of those snow-shrouded peaks, so rich in legendary lore. (143)

When Densmore urges her to "'leave these sandy wastes,'" with outstretched hand Cogewea continues, "'Leave this... where our forefathers fought, where they hunted the buffalo? Leave the land where our braves rest in their last sleep? Never! I could not be content elsewhere'" (143). Cogewea here reveals that it is not just the prairies and mountains themselves that mean so much to her, but, even more so, the Native past for which they are a repository. Indeed, the landscape over which Cogewea exclaims is not actually the site of her childhood upbringing. Her passionate bonds to her surroundings belie the fact that she grew up in the Evergreen State (32), not Montana, as she reminds Jim when annoyed by his exaggeration: "'Now don't start throwing me that hot air stuff.... I was born farther west than Montana, and you can't make anything like that stick with this squaw. Savey?'" (195). Showing state boundaries to be irrelevant, the frontier travels, and not only from east to west but from west to east. Yet there are limits to its mobility. Cogewea does not need to occupy the homeland of her own tribe, the Okanogans, but she does need to feel the presence of a recent Native American past, if not present, and this presence resides in the land. Although mixed bloods may embody the frontier, nevertheless the frontier is not merely theoretical but bound by history to literal locales. Mourning Dove makes clear that although Mary has the ability to relocate in France, Cogewea does not: The frontier cannot withstand such exportation.

NOTES

1. Alanna Kathleen Brown, "Legacy Profile: Mourning Dove," 53, in *Legacy* 6 no 1 (1989): 51-56.

2. Mourning Dove, *Cogewea: The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range* (Boston: Four Seas Co., 1927; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981). Throughout this article, I will use the text's own terms of *mixed blood* and *breed* to refer to those of both Native American and European descent. Subsequent references will be textual and indicated by page number in parentheses.

3. Louis Owens, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 40.

4. Biographers differ regarding Mourning Dove's ancestry. Brown contends that "Mourning Dove was either one-quarter or one-half Caucasian," while Jay Miller believes that Mourning Dove actually invented a white ancestor. Respectively, Brown, "Mourning Dove's Canadian Recovery Years, 1917-19," *Canadian Literature* 24 (1990): 113-22; Mourning Dove, *Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography*, ed. Jay Miller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 16.

5. Fisher, "Introduction," *Cogewea*, xxiii, xxiv.

6. Peter G. Beidler, "Literary Criticism in *Cogewea*: Mourning Dove's Protagonist Reads *The Brand*," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 19 no 2 (1995): 45-65.

7. Ibid., 51.

8. Like Beidler, I use the term *Mourning Dove* to denote authorship with the understanding that it might envelop the contributions of McWhorter as well. I write under the conviction, however, that the text is primarily Mourning Dove's and that her voice "easily win[s] out" over her editor's (Owens, *Other Destinies*, 44).

9. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 11-12.

10. Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1902; reprint, New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), xlvii.

11. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757* (New York: W. A. Townsend and Co., 1859), 78.

12. Susan L. Johnson, "A Memory Sweet to Soldiers: The Significance of Gender in the History of the American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* 24:4 (November 1993): 497.

13. Within the same paragraph, the text declares Frenchy a "courtly scion of France" and explains that Mary's "stately form and graceful movements would have been as much in keeping at a court of fashion, as with the picturesque surroundings of a western cattle ranch" (205).

14. Owens, *Other Destinies*, 48.

15. Fisher, *Cogewea*, v.

16. Ibid., xiv. For a fuller discussion of McWhorter and the editors of Mourning Dove's autobiography and *Coyote Tales*, see Brown, "Through the

Glass Darkly: The Editorialized Mourning Dove," *New Voices in Native American Criticism*, ed. Arnold Krupat (Washington: Smithsonian, 1993): 274-290.

17. Fisher, *Cogewea*, xv.

18. Although we cannot know with certitude what exactly McWhorter wrote, especially sentence by sentence, the text's lengthy ethnographic discourse on music very strongly suggests itself as his work, and Fisher attributes it to McWhorter without hesitation in her introduction, xv-xvi. Critics concur that the chapter epigraphs are McWhorter's, and, of course, the preface that bears his name certainly is. At any rate, my intention is not to portray Mourning Dove and McWhorter as antagonists. McWhorter was essential to Mourning Dove's literary production. Rather, my point is that certain assumptions about the frontier are so pervasive that they infiltrate even a text which works to overturn them.

19. Leslie Fiedler, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), 50.

20. Cogewea asks Jim, "'Why don't you marry one of [the homesteaders]? You would be ahead by a broad hundred and sixty acres of land; could afford to quit punching cattle, settle down and boss your own domain'" (113). At the lunch-basket auction, Jim passes on this apparently ubiquitous counsel of the range to Slim: "'if you capture a big feed with the cook thrown in, maybe you can begin startin' a ranch of your own'" (197). Indeed, the novel leaves open the possibility that the H-B ranch itself, "constructed on allotted Indian lands" (31), was the objective of John Carter's marriage to Cogewea's sister Julia.

21. Beidler argues that the intensity of Cogewea's response to *The Brand* derives not from the racist attitudes of the book itself but from recognizing herself in its characters: Henry, who reviles his mixed blood, and Bess, who is infatuated with a slick white easterner with dishonorable intentions. The unease this recognition occasions results in a misplaced rage towards the text itself. While in this respect Beidler is persuasive, I do not believe that Mourning Dove portrays Cogewea as assimilationist to the degree he suggests, that Cogewea "buys into the notion that the white way is the best way" (Beidler, "Literary Criticism," 59).

22. Gloria Anzaldua, "Preface," *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: aunt lute books, 1987), no pagination.

23. Similarly, when Cogewea tells Densmore to meet her at his "'trough at *"sitkum sun"*'—in other words, at the midday meal—Densmore repeats wonderingly after her "'*Trough! system sun!* What do you mean?'" (85).

24. Anzaldua, "Preface," *Borderlands*.

25. Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 127.

26. Cogewea's drift into incoherence here, her loss of her usual superb control over language, reveals Densmore's ill effect on her.

27. Cogewea attended the infamous Carlisle Indian School. The text suggests that Cogewea found her sojourn in the East a positive experience, but Mourning Dove does not indicate whether Cogewea's education served to

make her internalize the school's ethos of assimilation, as Beidler claims ("Literary Criticism," 59), or if, on the contrary, her experiences contributed to the rage against white prejudice that Cogewea so often voices.

28. William Bevis, "Native American Novels: Homing In," *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*, ed. Richard F. Fleck (Washington DC: Three Continents Press, 1993): 580-620.

29. Early in the text, Cogewea tells Jim, "'I was contemplating the possibilities of becoming an authoress, of writing a book. I have the theme all right and there is plenty of material yet available. What amuses you?' she suddenly asked, noticing the foreman's smile of incredulity.... 'I was just a thinkin' what a book you would write up.' 'Why? I can see no particular joke in writing a book.... I may surprise you yet ... even if I am a 'squaw' as you call me.... I may use the pen!'" (33-34).

30. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 11-12.