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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the novels Winter in the Blood by James Welch (Blackfeet/ Gros Ventre), Ghost Singer by Anna Lee Walters (Pawnee/ Otoe-Missouria), and Perma Red by Debra Magpie Earling (Salish). My analyses of these novels focus on representations of gender and the negative effects of Western patriarchy on Indigenous communities. In addition, I look closely at the ways in which Welch, Walters, and Earling invert traditional American Gothic conventions in order to erode colonialist ideologies that devalue American Indians and their past by representing them as vanished figures and ghostly presences in canonical works of American literature. I specifically analyze the literary representation of how non-Native gender roles have been internalized by Native characters and examine how Welch, Walters, and Earling use literature as a form of social critique. All three novelists write against the “literary genocide” of Native Americans, deconstruct American Indian stereotypes, and reclaim Native identities that are empowering today.
HAUNTED FAMILY HISTORIES: INTERNALIZED GENDER ROLES AND THE
GOTHIC IN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the novels Winter in the Blood by James Welch (Blackfeet/ Gros Venture), Ghost Singer by Anna Lee Walters (Pawnee/ Otoe-Missouria), and Perma Red by Debra Magpie Earling (Salish). Although these novels were published over a span of thirty years, they address similar identity issues that stem from Native American cultural and historical erasure. My analyses of these novels focus on representations of gender, the effects of Western patriarchy on Indigenous communities, and the ways in which Welch, Walters, and Earling manipulate traditional American Gothic ghosting tropes in order to challenge representations of the absolute fake indian. Two central questions to this thesis are: In what ways do Welch, Walters, and Earling deconstruct Western assaults on tribal gender structures, and how do these authors reclaim Native identity without simply portraying their characters as victims? In order to answer these questions, I rely heavily on Gerald Vizenor’s (Anishinaabe) theories of survivance in Manifest Manners, as well as Renée L. Bergland’s discussion of Indians as ghosts in The National Uncanny. Since I am examining the representation of characters from a literary tradition deeply rooted in the history of U.S. displacement and colonization of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous resistance to colonization, I also situate my readings within postcolonial criticism, new historicism, and Indigenous feminism.

My interest in internalized American Indian stereotypes and contemporary Native American literature stems from a personal connection. As an enrolled Maidu tribal member, I have grown up very self-aware of the American Indian stereotypes that continue to be perpetuated through mainstream media productions. These stereotypes have been internalized
and perpetuated not only by non-Native peoples, but Native peoples as well; Dustin Tahkahkera (Comanche Nation) writes we are all “recovering colonized” viewers and readers of American Indian depictions (Tahkahkera xi). In this thesis I consider how Native fiction authors decolonize both Native and non-Native held stereotypes about American Indians. The static “Indian” image in today’s world conscience completely ignores the fact that Native American people continue to exist, come from diverse backgrounds, and do not all have the same physical appearances. My academic interest in and approach to internalized American Indian gender roles has also been largely influenced by my Maidu elders. I spent much of my childhood with my great-grandmother, who began sharing stories with me at an early age. These stories included personal experiences of growing up with the awareness of being “Other,” as well as oral stories passed down from my great-great grandmother, who attended Stewart Indian Boarding School. These eventful stories taught me about the lasting effects of colonialism and discrimination, our distorted colonial past, as well as internalized Native American stereotypes that continue to be problematic. Furthermore, when I was introduced to contemporary Native American literature as a college undergraduate, I became interested in a group of contemporary Native American writers, including N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe), and Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene) who use their art as a way to write against the literary genocide of American Indians and dominant Western representations of the Indian as the stoic, savage, and vanishing male figure in popular media productions. These combined experiences inspired me to focus this thesis on contemporary Native American writers who continue to resist Native American stereotypes by decolonizing non-Native gender constructs. In this thesis, I specifically analyze how non-Native gender roles have been internalized by Native peoples and how Native writers use literature to deconstruct Indian stereotypes and reclaim Native identities that are
empowering today.

**Imperial Eyes: The Function of the American Indian Stereotype**

In 1492, Columbus arrived in the Americas, a territory he mistakenly thought was India. Of course, it was never India and the people were never Indians (at least not before Columbus arrived). The idea of the *Indian* was and still is a Euro-American invention that continues to evoke imagery of the uncivilized, vanishing figure of the past and represents a static image of multiple tribes. As Robert Berkhofer writes in *The White Man’s Indian*, original tribes of the Americas neither called themselves by a single term nor understood themselves as a collective people (3). In addition, Native peoples were initially divided into thousands of cultures, practiced a multiplicity of customs, held a variety of values and beliefs, and spoke many languages (Berkhofer 3). Before Columbus discovered the “New World,” he had already invented the new landscape in his mind and refused to see America as distinct from Asia. Amerigo Vespucci was the first person on record to say that the territory was “new” and not Asia, leading to the European name “America” (Hulme 8-9, 268). Although Columbus’ mistake of claiming the territory as India was amended by Vespucci, European travel writers continued to perpetuate the image of Native peoples as “Indians” through centuries of colonial discourse (Berkhofer 5). As Mary Louise Pratt argues, travel writing gazes upon the landscape by using *imperial eyes* that reinvent it with prospects of vast expansionist possibilities, technology, commodities, and systems of knowledge (Pratt 112). Explorers and settlers saw the New World in the exact way they wanted to see it, and wrote about new-to-them discoveries through this colonial lens. Native peoples, in turn, were depicted through the imperial gaze.

Columbus’ initial descriptions of American Indians in the New World are very similar to the contemporary stereotypes that remain today. As Berkhofer states, “The initial image of the
Indian, like the word itself, came from the pen of Columbus” (Berkhofer 5). Despite his inability to communicate with Natives, Columbus’ travel narratives attempt to identify Native peoples and speak on behalf of their customs and beliefs. In a published letter from 1493, Columbus records, “[Natives] do not hold any creed nor are they idolaters; but they all believe that power and good are in the heavens and were very firmly convinced that I, with these ships and men, came from the heavens . . . It is because they have never seen people clothed or ships of such a kind . . .” (qtd. in Berkhofer 6). Although Columbus describes Indigenous tribes as religious, he also describes them as lacking a religious doctrine. In doing so, he plays on the colonial desire to “save” Native Americans through the Christian religion. As Berkhofer argues, colonialism defines American Indians “by what they are lacking in terms of White ways rather than being positively described from within the framework of the specific culture” (Berkhofer 26). The constructed images of American Indians as deficient began with Columbus’ depictions; however, they continue in the present day, as revealed in the United States’s recorded history.

Depictions of Native peoples from Columbus’s period continue today; the non-Native society characterizes American Indians as “lacking in terms of white ways” as a strategy to fulfill the needs of colonialism and settler colonialism that continues to shape the United States as a nation. In addition, colonial discourses have depicted American Indians as deficient in order to advocate assimilation into mainstream society and justify the termination of Native peoples’ rights, which is especially noticeable with major Indian laws and policies that have taken place over the past few centuries. These laws include: The Trade and Intercourse Act (1834), The Indian Removal Act (1830), Suspension of Treaty-Making (1871), The Major Crimes Act (1885), The Dawes General Allotment Act (1887), The Termination Act (1953), The Relocation Act (1956), as well as the century old policy lasting from 1860-1978 that forcibly and
systematically transferred the care of Native children to non-Natives through Indian boarding school systems and wholesale adoptions (Deloria 46-48, Jaimes 13-17). Columbus’ imperial gaze has become the basis of Euro-American constructions of Native Americans that have influenced government policies as well as worldwide perceptions of Natives as deficient.

**National Amnesia: American Indians in the Modern American Mind**

Although a large portion of my thesis examines the ways in which Welch, Walters, and Earling challenge and resist American Indian stereotypes, I also argue that these authors expose the ways in which these stereotypes are engrained in America’s national identity. As Arnold Krupat argues in *The Voice in the Margin*, “American culture has had, has now, and will continue to have some relation to Native American culture—although that relation has most frequently been one of avoidance” (3). Dominant non-Native discourses have taken part in creating an American national identity by ignoring the history of colonialism, cultural erasure, as well as the Native American perspective. As a result, static non-Native constructions of the Indian are portrayed as “authentic” while the perspectives of real Native Americans are silenced. As Susan Bernardin argues, “mainstream conceptions of American Indians remain in large part unchanged, unnourished by a steady diet of such cinematic features as *Pocahontas* and *Dances with Wolves*, by professional sports team mascots, and by a legion of fraudulent Indian texts shelved in the ‘Native American section’ of bookstores” (Bernardin 155). The concept of tribal “authenticity” has remained an issue for contemporary Native Americans as constructed images of the “Indian” continue to be marketed as commodities and caricatures. Furthermore, Native American voices remain silenced in American literature and mainstream media productions, while “Indians” are only visible as “Noble” or “Savage,” denied survival, and continue to be ghosted in national discourses.
Contemporary American perceptions of Indian stereotypes are largely centered around the nation’s relationship to colonial progress. Variations of the American Indian stereotype range from the “vanishing Indian,” to the “warrior,” to the “drunken Indian,” to the “squaw.” These popular depictions are facilitated through binary comparisons to Euro-American cultural perceptions of progress and assumes white as a default racial and cultural category as normative. For example, the Noble Savage stereotype represents an idealized Other before moments of colonial crises. As Shari Huhndorf argues, popular non-Native representations of Natives include a nostalgic revisit to the frontier prior to colonial conquest of Native America and are attempts to resolve “anxieties about the terrible violence marking the nation’s origins” (Huhndorf 2). Popular representations such as *Dances with Wolves* (1990) attempt to recapture and retell the history of the relationship between Natives and non-Natives as Euro-Americans distance themselves from the violence of colonial conquest. Although Natives are depicted as “Noble” in films like *Dances with Wolves*, non-Natives are still represented as superior to their Native counterparts. Furthermore, the Savage stereotype portrays American Indians as violent and “bloodthirsty” which reinforces progress as defined by Euro-Americans and justifies colonial violence against Native peoples. In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin argues that American Indians are represented through rhetorical strategies that are intended to hide economic intentions behind colonial conflict (560). Imagining American Indians through popular constructed stereotypes has historically provided justification for colonization, including the annihilation of thousands of tribal societies and cultures. Noble Indian stereotypes allow readers to escape violent historical moments, while Ignoble/Savage representations provide Euro-Americans a way to justify expansion and celebrate the triumph of colonial progress. All of these stereotypes continue to evolve in America’s nationalist discourse.
America’s nationhood has also largely been constructed through depictions of ghostly and demonic Indians in American Gothic literature. In “Indian Ghosts and American Subjects,” scholar Renée Bergland argues that dominant non-Native writers “insist that Indians are able to appear and disappear suddenly and mysteriously, and also that they are ultimately doomed to vanish” (1). Bergland uses the term, “ghost,” to refer to American Indians as spectral figures; she also uses “ghost” as a verb that registers how texts literally vanish Native peoples. When society accepts popular images of American Indians as ghostly figures, they also risk forgetting the fact that many Indigenous tribes survived colonialism and are still alive. As Bergland argues, “By focusing almost exclusively on those who perished, early American writing enacted a literary Indian removal that reinforced and at times even helped to construct the political Indian Removal” (“Indian Ghosts” 3). Many popular American poems, fictional narratives, histories, philosophies, and even scientific essays have denied Indian survival by both mourning and celebrating the false extinction of Native Americans.

Charles Brockden Brown is one example of an iconic American Gothic writer who relies on the nationalist discourse of the violent Indian ghost in the novel, *Edgar Huntly*. In the preface to *Edgar Huntly*, Brown explains that he replaces “Gothic castles and chimeras” of the traditional European Gothic genre with “the incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of western wilderness” (Brockden 4). The novel’s American identity depends on Indian wars and the mystery of the dangerous frontier that is haunted by violent Delaware Indians. The protagonist, Edgar Huntly, is an Indian-fighter and describes Natives as a force to be feared and highlights their appearance as different from white settlers: “I was somewhat startled at these appearances. The legs were naked, and scored into uncouth figures. The *mocassins* which lay beside them, and which were adorned in a grotesque manner, in addition to other incidents,
immediately suggested the suspicion that they were Indians” (Brockden 115). Native Americans are only identified as Natives when Edgar makes assumptions based off of their “grotesque” appearances. Natives are also described as being dangerous as Edgar reflects on Indian raids and states, “I never looked upon, or called up the image of a savage without shuddering” (Brockden 116). Edgar’s repressed hatred and fear of American Indians drive him towards his own violent desires as he takes on the stereotypical roles of the “Savage,” by using a tom-hawk and becoming a murderer, himself. Edgar also assumes he is far from home and lost in the wilderness when he comes into contact with Natives: “Had some mysterious power snatched me from the earth, and cast me, in a moment, into the heart of the wilderness?” (Brockden 115). Edgar assumes that Natives only exist on the wild frontier, a place that he describes as far from earth thus disconnected from idealized myths of settler-civilization. Throughout *Edgar Huntly*, Indians are represented as spectral figures that haunt both visible and invisible worlds.

Washington Irving has also taken part in constructing America’s national literature through the ghostly figure of the Native American. In “Traits of Indian Character,” Irving assumes the inevitability of American Indian extinction and writes, “They will vanish like the vapor from the face of the earth; their very history will be lost in forgetfulness; and the ‘places that now know them will know them no more for ever’” (Irving 249). Irving’s description of Native Americans as “vapor” reinforces the notion that Indians will inevitably disappear and are doomed to vanish. Furthermore, Irving describes American Indians as being justifiably angry but also threatening to the non-Native society. Irving writes, “The colonist often treated them like beasts of the forest; and the author has endeavored to justify him in his outrages” (Irving 241). Throughout Irving’s writing, American Indians are described as being violent as well as driven away by their colonizers, and existing Natives are ghosted.
In the popular American imagination, Indian ghosts also function both as triumphant agents of Americanization and representations of national guilt. As Bergland argues, American Indians haunt the landscape and thus backdrop of American literature as they take supernatural possession of their dispossessors (“Indian Ghosts” 3). Furthermore, while Euro-Americans take possession of Native American lands, Native Americans vanish into the minds of their colonizers. For example, in the novel, *Absalom Absalom!* by William Faulkner, American Indians are described as figures of the past that can only be seen through the eyes of the colonizer. The narrator, Quentin, describes the territory of West Virginia in 1808, before it was officially a state and stolen from tribal communities: “the only colored people were Indians and you only looked down at them over your rifle sights” (Faulkner 179). Although Indians are briefly described as existing in the year 1808, the violent history of the battles and conflicts between colonists and Native Americans in the territory of West Virginia are completely ghosted. Furthermore, American Indians are only represented in the past and as defeated by colonizers, and are solely described through the lens of the colonizer, particularly with the novel’s lament over the Chickasaw land of Mississippi where Sutpen “Tore violently” a plantation “from a tribe of ignorant Indians” (Faulkner 5, 10). As Bergland states, representations of ghostly Indians in American Gothic texts remain central to sources of anxiety, trauma, guilt, melancholy, and death (“Indian Ghosts” 3). Triumphant narratives of colonial conquest conjure America’s national identity and do not include narratives of American Indian resistance. Popular American Gothic authors such as Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, and William Faulkner literally remove American Indians from the American landscape and affirm colonial domination by ghosting the historical context of the violent colonial invasions of tribal lands, silencing Native American voices, and reinforcing the stereotype of American Indians as
Vanished.

Dominant non-Native writers continue to use Gothic ghosting tropes in order to completely remove minority groups of people from the American imagination. Euro-American writers who use the rhetorical device of ghosting also reimagine the American frontier as a free and open territory that erases historical sites of colonial violence. In this way, dominant non-Native writers ghost sites of colonial contact and internalize a national space in order to transform the history surrounding American territories. As Bergland states, “The discursive removal of Indians from American physical territory and the Americanization of the imaginative territory into which Indians are removed are two good explanations for the ideological power of the figure of the Indian ghost” (“Indian Ghosts” 5). These ideological images of Indian ghosts also reinforce the idea that American Indians are non-existent.

Traditional American Gothic ghosting tropes also draw on the ideological power of reinforcing the Otherness of various repressed groups. These groups include nation, race, class, and gender. Furthermore, when repressed minority groups are represented as ghosted Others they become uncanny figures. In “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud states that the German word for uncanny, *unheimlich*, means un-homely, or unsettling (Freud 133). This sense of unsettledness evokes a sense of anxiety and opposes civilization to the mysterious world of the irrational and savage. As Bergland argues, ghosts become uncanny figures and are representations of groups of people who are either unsettled, not yet colonized, unsuccessfully colonized, or decolonized (“Indian Ghosts” 11). Furthermore, ghosts become a symbol of what has been buried and thus conquered in the dominant American society’s imagination.

American nationalism has been centered largely on the denial of colonialism, especially of Native peoples. As a result, the static product of the Indian as savage, uncivilized, and vanished
has continued to provide a lucrative image for the dominant non-Native American society. This can be seen with the success of films that continue to recast the frontier as a pure landscape, haunted by violent American Indians, as seen in *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), and *Pocahontas* (1995). These popular representations, presented by non-Natives, end with utopic qualities, where Euro-American heroes are distanced from colonial violence. In addition, the frontier is continuously depicted it as a wide open space that separates the savage from the civilized, represents non-Natives as peacefully immersing and accepting of “primitive” societies, and removes any traces of colonial genocide. While American literature and media both recast the frontier as a pure place that only reserves violence for Ignoble Indians, these representations also remind readers and viewers of the origins of America’s national identity. From the colonial period to the present day, Euro-Americans have continued to construct a national history by inventing stereotypical “Indian” images in order to mark violent acts of “progress” as justified. Furthermore, ongoing constructions of the “Indian” influence non-Native viewers and readers to distance themselves from the history of colonial contact, the violence of the frontier, and the existence of American Indians in the present day.

Like many other colonized people throughout the world, Native Americans have learned to internalize the codes of their oppressors, viewing representations of American Indian cultures through non-Native constructs that continue to define them as Other. In *Other Destinies: Understanding the Native American Novel*, Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee) states, “The Indian in today’s world consciousness is a product of literature, history, art, and a product that, as an invention, often bears little resemblance to actual, living Native American people” (*Other Destinies* 4). In other words, to be Native American in the present day is to essentially be unreal and ahistorical. As Vine Deloria (Sioux) states in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, “Experts paint us as
they would like us to be. Often we paint ourselves as we wish we were or as we might have been” (2). In order to avoid internalizing stereotypes created by non-Native oppressors, American Indians are often forced to defend what they have never been. Understanding the function of American Indian stereotypes and their origins allows us to see the way Native American authors are encouraging readers to consider what exactly it means to be “American” and how this also impacts Native identity. All of these concerns provide context for my thesis as I build on them and analyze the way Welch, Walters, and Earling address and resist American Indian stereotypes, specifically regarding Native gender structures, that have evolved throughout centuries of America’s nationalist discourse and Western patriarchal ideologies.

Reversing the Gaze: Survival and Resistance in Contemporary Native American Literature

Prior to N. Scott Momaday’s (Kiowa) *House Made of Dawn* (1968), relatively few Native American authors had published works of fiction that reached large audiences. In 1983, Kenneth Lincoln coined the term *Native American Renaissance* in order to describe the emergence of Native American literary works that followed the publication of *House Made of Dawn*. Lincoln defined the purpose of the Native American Renaissance as the act of “tracing the connective threads between the cultural past and its expression to the present” (Lincoln 2). As Lincoln argues, Native American literatures are not historical artifacts of America’s past but are both ancient and ongoing (Lincoln 2). Although there is a myriad of cultural differences between Native American texts, they all share common concerns of identity and displacement. As Lincoln contends, “A scholar should attend to culture-specific differences among tribes but also recognize the pan-Indian acculturations that reunify tribal Americans among themselves and across tribes” (Lincoln 9). Common literary approaches that came from the Native American Renaissance include a written renewal of American Indian traditions that are translated to
Western literary forms as well as a rebirth of cultural survival in the present day. For many contemporary American Indian novelists, identity, authenticity, rebirth of cultural history, and survival in the present day continue to be central issues and themes.

Indigenous literary responses to the cultural, social, and physical violence of colonization often utilize Indigenous narrative traditions in ways distinct from Euro-American writers. Throughout this thesis, I rely heavily on Gerald Vizenor’s (Anishinaabe) theories of survivance in order to analyze the ways in which Welch, Walters, and Earling deconstruct Western assaults on tribal gender structures. In *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, Vizenor argues that simulations of the Indian, or *manifest manners*, are constructed through dominant colonial representations and delegitimize contemporary Native Americans (11). In other words, popular representations of the Indian are colonial enactments that replace the presence of original peoples with hyperreal images. Vizenor defines *manifest manners* as “the course of dominance, the racialist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as ‘authentic’ representations of *indian* cultures” (*Manifest Manners* 1). Furthermore, he purposely refers to the Indian as the *absolute fake or indian*; the italics and lowercase “i” convey the idea that the Indian in America’s national discourse is a constructed Other that continues to be manifested through dominant colonial discourses. As Vizenor argues, the word Indian, itself, has also sustained dominance by superseding real tribal names (*Manifest Manners* 11). In order to survive and resist Euro-American inventions of the *absolute fake*, Native American authors become what Vizenor calls, *postindian warriors*. Postindian warriors replace Western constructs with new tribal presences by writing themselves into America’s national history and absolving popular representations of the ghosted Indian (*Manifest Manners* 4). In doing so, writers use *acts of survivance*: a cross between cultural survival and resistance to Western dominance that insists
that Native peoples will continue to have an active presence in today’s society (Manifest Manners 4).

One of the ways Native American writers deconstruct misrepresentations of the absolute fake is through the use of trickster hermeneutics. According to Vizenor, postindian warriors use trickster hermeneutics in order to rewrite existing narratives by using ironies of descent, third gender, themes of transmutation, and transformation. America’s national narrative is also mediated and transformed by trickster hermeneutics when new stories arise. In addition, trickster characters use humor to oust popular Western inventions of the indian and never reach a final closure in their narratives (Manifest Manners 15). The aim of trickster discourse is to tease simulations of the indian as the tragic primitive of America’s colonial past and to provide realities of chance, fate, and wisdom that have all been denied to Native Americans in national discourses (Manifest Manners 15). Furthermore, the recovery of Native identity and deconstruction of the absolute fake is a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place and community.

Vizenor also argues that Native authors reshape the national narrative through a modern day Ghost Dance. Vizenor states, “The shadows and language of tribal poets and novelists could be the new ghost dance literature, the shadow literature of liberation that enlivens tribal survivance” (Manifest Manners 106). Vizenor’s theories on Ghost Dance literature are based on Wovoka’s prophecy. The historical 19th century Paiute leader Wovoka is known as the “Ghost Dance Prophet” who according to tradition died and was reborn after having a vision with messages about the sacred Ghost Dance, a religious ceremony of which he was told that would reunite all living and dead American Indians in a paradise where they would be free from poverty, disease, and death (Moses 336). Furthermore, Wovoka prophesized a great cataclysm
that would rid the dominant Euro-American society and their violent colonizing ways, and inaugurate an American Indian millennium (Moses 336). All of this was predicted to occur through the literal performance of the Ghost Dance, which spread rapidly amongst numerous Western tribes from 1870 to 1890 (Moses 336). Vizenor argues that Native American authors continue Wovoka’s Ghost Dance by using literature as a way to write stories of endurance and survivance in order to revise the national narrative and preserve Native traditions (Manifest Manners 106).

Contemporary Native American authors also claim the English language and use it in a “literary choreography” to perform a new kind of Ghost Dance. Although English is the colonial language and Western formal learning systems have forbidden American Indians to use their Native languages in the predominant English-speaking world, Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo) argues that writing in the English language can promote cultural continuity when Native writers write with a sense of Indigenous consciousness (qtd. in Weaver, Womack, and Warrior xiv). Ortiz states, “Three hundred years may seem like a long time but Indigenous American oral tradition and the knowledge-experience it conveys is ageless when we Indigenous people consider it as the basis of our human cultural Existence” (qtd. in Weaver, Womack, and Warrior viii). In other words, the English language can be used as an act of survivance when writers bring forward Native voices that are uncompromised by colonial mentalities. Furthermore, Native American writers resist becoming victims of colonialism when they manipulate the English language. As Jace Weaver (Cherokee), Craig S. Womack (Muscogee Creek/Cherokee), and Robert Warrior (Osage) state, “Claiming English as an Indian language is one of the most important, if not the most important step toward insuring Indian survival for future generations” (Weaver, Womack, and Warrior xviii). Claiming English as an “Indian language” does not mean
that Native languages and traditions should be forgotten; it means that more colonial languages should be learned and mastered by American Indian writers in order to regenerate indigeneity and to write back against national discourses that create false depictions of Native Americans and history (Weaver, Womack, and Warrior xviii). Contemporary American Indian writers, like Welch, Walters, and Earling strategically use the English language as a literary form of Ghost Dance in order to celebrate cultural continuity and privilege the Native experience.

American Indian authors also perform a modern day Ghost Dance by incorporating cultural hauntings in literature to renew Native traditions. As Kathleen Brogan argues, Native ghosts have a double role in Native American literature, serving as a metaphor for cultural invisibility and cultural continuity (Brogan 31). While Ghosts in American Gothic texts written by non-Native writers are demonic and function as a plot device to bury hidden histories and incite fear of minority groups of people, ghosts in Indigenous Gothic texts attempt to recover and make social use of poorly documented and erased histories. Furthermore, discoveries of ghosts in contemporary Native American literature help invert the stereotype of the vanished Indian. As Brogan states, “Ghosts in contemporary American ethnic literature function to re-create ethnic identities through an imaginative recuperation of the past, and to press this new version of the past into the present” (Brogan 4). American Indian authors use cultural hauntings in contemporary Native American literature in order to deconstruct the imperial gaze and explore hidden passageways not only of the individual psyche, but also of America’s historical consciousness.

Native American authors have also been actively challenging America’s national identity through their careful application and manipulation of traditional American Gothic tropes. In “Is There an Indigenous Gothic?,” Michelle Burnham argues there is a difference between Settler
Gothic and Indigenous Gothic. As Burnham asserts, Settler Gothic belongs to traditional American Gothic texts written by non-Native writers and represents features that form a national identity through depictions of triumphant yet guilty histories of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples (Burnham 228). Indigenous Gothic, on the other hand, engages with and writes back against such treatments. In contrast to traditional American Gothic texts that represent Natives as symbols of anxiety and guilt, Native ghosts become figures of resistance in Indigenous Gothic texts. Furthermore, ghostly presences must be tolerated rather than conquered or eliminated in Indigenous Gothic (Burnham 233). Through the agency of Native ghosts, tribal histories that have been threatened, erased, or fragmented in America’s national narrative are recuperated and revised. Another distinguishing factor between Indigenous and American Gothic tropes is the haunted space between the living and dead. While haunted spaces are still represented as terrifying in Indigenous Gothic, they are also crucial because they help preserve the colonial past by bringing the dead into dialogue with the living (Burnham 233).

In this thesis, I expand on Vizenor’s theories of survivance as well as the study of Indigenous Gothic by analyzing representations of gender and examining how Welch, Walters, and Earling apply Gothic ghosting tropes in order to provide survivance to Native American bloodlines. Although Welch, Walters, and Earling all deconstruct nationalist representations of the indian through their use of trickster hermeneutics as well as manipulations of American Gothic tropes, their approaches of ghosting are very different in regards to gender and race. A central question to my investigation of Winter in the Blood, Ghost Singer, and Perma Red is: how do American Indian authors decolonize Western assaults on tribal gender structures? Does a return to “tribal roots” (also known as the “homing” narrative so archetypal to investigations of the Native American Literary Renaissance) really mean a return to non-Western gendered and
sexual concepts? Furthermore, how do Welch, Walters, and Earling address the history of “victimry” while also resisting simply portraying their characters as victims, and how does the tension between Western and tribal gender constructs help forward an empowered sense of Native identity?

In chapter one, I analyze the displacement of men in *Winter in the Blood* through a Gothic lens in order to show that Native women hold important places in society, both on and off of the Fort Belknap reservation. Although *Winter in the Blood* has already been widely discussed by scholars, analyzing the text through a Gothic lens is not a common approach and therefore provides a new perspective on the novel’s outcomes. I also argue that Native maternal bloodlines are necessary for the narrator’s recovery of masculinity, which is also connected to the narrator’s Blackfeet identity. Furthermore, Welch deconstructs Western assaults on tribal gender structures by ghosting non-Native paternal bloodlines. Analyzing Welch’s careful application and manipulation of traditional American Gothic ghosting tropes provides survival for the narrator as his ancestry is not only recovered from the past but also revealed as still existing in the present.

In chapter two, I analyze how Walters manipulates traditional American Gothic tropes in *Ghost Singer* in order to cast the dominant non-Native society as the monstrous Other. In this chapter, I argue that Walters represents Native American characters as constructive signifiers by inverting traditional racial dynamics of American Settler Gothic. Furthermore, she confronts the political removal of American Indians from the national narrative by ghosting Native maternal bloodlines. Unlike *Winter in the Blood*, survival is dependent on Native paternal bloodlines in *Ghost Singer*. I also argue that Walters uses cultural hauntings to lead to a valuable awareness of how the past of settler colonialism continues to inhabit and inform the living for both non-Native and Native American people, therefore turning popular representations of Indian subjects into
uncanny figures.

In chapter three, I analyze the ways in which Earling manipulates traditional American Gothic ghosting tropes in the novel, *Perma Red*, in order to resist Western patriarchy and provide survivance for Native American men and women. Many characters in the novel are negatively affected by Western patriarchal ideology and are victims of violence. For this reason, I have chosen to examine this text through an Indigenous Feminist lens and explore the Indigenous feminist claim that gender violence is not just a tool for patriarchal control but also serves as a tool for racism, colonialism, and genocide (Smith 8). In this chapter, I also analyze how Earling confronts and challenges Western patriarchy in *Perma Red* by providing an in-depth analysis of characters who resist adopting colonial attitudes and comparing them to Native characters who internalize Western patriarchal views. Furthermore, I argue that Earling manipulates traditional American Gothic tropes by ghosting non-Native bloodlines in order to deconstruct Western assaults on tribal gender structures.

All three texts that I am analyzing are the authors’ very first published novels. Although the novels have been published over a span of thirty years, they deal with the same challenges of being othered by the dominant non-Native society, the negative effects of colonialism on American Indian identities, and issues of cultural and historical erasure. Examining these authors in connection to each other will provide an important opportunity to help define a larger purpose of the Gothic genre as it relates to Vizenor’s theories of survivance and how that intersects with the destruction of American Indian stereotypes and internalized Native American gender structures.
CHAPTER ONE:
RE-POPULATING NATIVE ANCESTRIES:
AN UNCANNY RE-ГОHOSTING IN WINTER IN THE BLOOD

James Welch’s (Blackfeet/Gros Ventre) first novel, Winter in the Blood, was published during the first wave of the Native American Renaissance, a time when American Indian voices were beginning to be heard across the nation through political action, leadership, and literature. Throughout the novel, Welch reveals a vivid image of the individual Native American’s struggle for identity and survival in contemporary America. The novel is told in the first person by an unnamed narrator, who closes his distance from his Blackfeet culture by literally coming home, personally, culturally, and geographically. In the novel, Welch addresses the colonial history of cultural erasure, however, he resists simply portraying the Blackfeet as victims in order to emphasize survivance. In this chapter, I argue that Welch decolonizes depictions of the “absolute fake” Indian, or indian, in Winter in the Blood through his careful application and manipulation of American Gothic tropes. In doing so, he deconstructs Western assaults on tribal gender structures by ghosting non-Native paternal bloodlines, making survival dependent on Native maternal bloodlines, and repopulating geographic locations with the presence of ancestors that were once ghosted by the dominant Euro-American society.

Many scholars have discussed the use of trickster hermeneutics in Winter in the Blood, especially in connection to Blackfeet mythology and gender. Kenneth Lincoln notes that “The key to Welch’s art seems an adversary’s sense of reality-attitudes that resist, counter, and invert conventions” (Lincoln 150). Dominant Western conventions are especially inverted when it comes to constructions of the Indian and gender roles. For example, female Indian characters often complain of male Indian characters being disoriented “wanderers” throughout the novel. As Lincoln points out, the dislocated American Indian characters in Winter in the Blood stem
from Blackfeet creation parables of “Old Man” (Na’pi) and “Old Woman” (Kipitaki) and are the very subject of Trickster’s grim humor (Lincoln 153). According to Blackfeet mythology, Old Man and Old Woman were the original beings and were wedded contraries, a combination of creator spirits and first people, and illustrate the dialectic nature of a world where men and women are fated as “counterfools” (Lincoln 151). In Winter in the Blood, the narrator catches a glimpse of his traditional Blackfeet roots, before the Blackfeet tribe was forced onto the Fort Belknap Reservation, through his grandmother’s stories and the aid of Yellow Calf (who hints at being the narrator’s grandfather). Lincoln argues that the narrator’s grandmother and Yellow Calf both represent Old Woman and Old Man from Blackfeet mythology and only readers familiar with Blackfeet mythology would recognize how Welch uses trickster discourse to provide a contemporary retelling of tribal stories.

Cultural displacement and a recovery of tribal roots have also been widely discussed by scholars referring to Winter in the Blood. In Red Land, Red Power, Sean Kicummah Teuton (Cherokee) asserts that among American Indians, the decolonization of tribal communities often involves a process of recovery, a conscious act of reclaiming knowledge of a tribal self and knowledge that has often been distorted by centuries of European and American oppression (80). Recovered identities are not necessarily based on a cultural or racial essence, but instead can operate as revisable constructs to reconnect with tribal pasts, a process that produces new knowledge to inform the individual in the present world (Kicummah Teuton 81). Some of Welch’s acts of recovery in Winter in the Blood occur through the unnamed narrator’s dreams. In Other Destinies, Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee) states, “Welch allows the surrealism of dreams to interpenetrate everyday reality and exploits the familiar technique of flashback to merge past and present” (128). Furthermore, Owens argues that Welch’s narrator’s recovery is
one that includes a coherent sense of self and centered sense of personal identity, but also a recovery dependent upon a renewed sense of cultural identity as specifically Blackfeet (Other Destinies 131). Once the narrator is able to make progress towards a rediscovery of a coherent sense of self that includes his Blackfeet roots, he is able to unify the past, present, and future (Other Destinies 131). This journey of cultural rediscovery and rebirth of a tribal past has been extremely popular in discussions of Winter in the Blood.

Many scholars have also talked about the unnamed narrator’s distance from himself as well as his Blackfeet culture. In “‘The Event of Distance’: James Welch’s Place in Space and Time,” Kathryn Shanley (Nakoda) argues that the narrator experiences distance that involves a confrontation with the sublime and the self, providing an opportunity for self-recognition (110). Shanley asserts, Winter in the Blood offers optimism by presenting a character who ceases to be merely a victim of the dominant society and providing a voice from inside Indian country, shattering the mainstream perception that American Indians exist solely in the past (Shanley 108). Welch overcomes stereotypes of American Indians as noble, tragic, and alienated, by presenting readers with a Blackfeet narrator who confronts his own problems. He does this by seeking wisdom from the world around him and being an active participant in society rather than a silent victim. As Shanley points out, Welch’s narrator locates his issues as originating from within, rather than blaming society (Shanley 111). In doing so, Welch presents an American Indian character who breaks the silence by gaining recognition from both Natives and non-Natives. Furthermore, he realizes his distance from his Blackfeet identity is something beyond colonialism and postcolonial erasure, and instead an internal confrontation.

Much of the critical discussion of Winter in the Blood has considered themes of Blackfeet mythology in relation to gender, cultural displacement, and the recovery of tribal roots, but has
overlooked how Welch inverts traditional American Gothic conventions as a strategy for survival. In “Is there an Indigenous Gothic?” Michelle Burnham argues that there is a difference between Settler Gothic and Indigenous Gothic, asserting that Settler Gothic belongs to traditional American Gothic texts written by non-Native writers and represents features that form a national identity through depictions of triumphant yet guilty histories of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples (228). In addition, scholar Alan R. Velie states, “As American literature developed, the Indian became the shadow who opposed the white persona not only in shoddy dime novels, but the works of authors of the caliber of Twain and Hawthorne” (Velie 77). The American Indian in today’s world conscious is a ghostly product of the colonial past that bears little resemblance to actual, living Native Americans. As Louis Owens contends, “Identity for Native Americans is made more complex yet by the fact that the American Indian in the world consciousness is a treasured invention, a gothic artifact evoked like the ‘powwows’ in Hawthorne’s ‘Young Goodman Brown’ out of the dark reaches of the continent to replace the actual [N]ative, who, painfully problematic in real life, is supposed to have long since vanished” (Other Destinies 4). As Burnham, Velie, and Owens argue, the American national presence is predicated upon the shadows and absence of Native Americans. In this chapter, I argue that Welch writes back against historical erasure and literary genocide by recovering tribal presences and incorporating Indigenous perspectives of colonial conquest. Welch’s approach is uniquely Gothic because he manipulates traditional American Gothic tropes that silence Native voices and deny Indian survival, by silencing non-Native perspectives of colonialism and ghosting members of the dominant non-Native society.

In addition to being depicted as shadows in the national narrative, the figure of the American Indian in American Gothic literature traditionally remains central to sources of
anxiety, guilt, and trauma. In “Indian Ghosts and American Subjects,” Renée Bergland argues that early American Gothic writers assumed the inevitability of Indians as vanished and enacted a literary Indian removal through constructions of ghostly Indians (3). Furthermore, American Indians are often described as objects of melancholy, loss, homelessness, and death in traditional American Gothic works (“Indian Ghosts” 3). While Euro-Americans take possession of Native American lands, American Indians become ghosted and vanish into the minds of their colonizers, haunting the landscape and thus the backdrop of American literature. Women have also been perceived as threatening subjects to the American national imagination and become ghosted in traditional American Gothic works (“Indian Ghosts” 17). Repressed minority groups become uncanny figures as writers evoke a sense of anxiety in order reinforce Otherness. In “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud states that writers employ a sense of unsettledness through their use of the uncanny when the familiar suddenly becomes unfamiliar as things that were once concealed become frightening when revealed (Freud 124, 132). Nation, race, class, and gender are all subjects that become ghosted in American history and literature, as ghosts literally become the things that the dominant patriarchal society tries to bury. Early American Gothic writers such as Washington Irving and Charles Brockden Brown have denied Indian survival by mourning and celebrating the false extinction of Native Americans in their texts.

Analyzing Winter in the Blood through a Gothic lens is not a common approach and provides a new perspective of Welch’s use of survivance. Many literary critics have also overlooked the strong roles that female characters play in Winter in the Blood, which reiterates Bergland’s argument that like race, gender is often ghosted by members of the dominant society in the traditional American Gothic tale (“Indian Ghosts” 17). In this chapter, I argue that Native women are necessary for the survival of Native men in Winter in the Blood and that Welch’s
representation of powerful Native women doubly inverts the Gothic convention of the ghosted Indian and vanishing female subject. Although Welch reveals how colonial attitudes towards both Native women and Native men have affected gender identities and created tension between Western and tribal gender constructs, he provides a text of survivance by ghosting non-Native paternal bloodlines, making survival dependent on Native maternal bloodlines, and repopulating geographic locations with the presence of ancestors who were once ghosted by the dominant Euro-American society.

**Welch’s Manipulation of American Gothic Tropes**

Welch initially uses traditional Gothic conventions of ghosting in *Winter in the Blood* to symbolize cultural invisibility. The reservation is first described as an empty, dead space with the introduction of the Earthboy’s cabin, a “bare gray skeleton, home only to mice and insects. Tumbleweeds, stark as bone” (Welch 1). The cabin is a literal skeleton that only provides shelter for mice and insects. Furthermore, the tumbleweeds are described as being bare and dead in a way that is similar to the decaying human body as they are described as bones. The landscape initially represents death and a ghosted Blackfeet ancestry as the narrator’s descriptions insinuate that there are no surviving relatives. The bloodline of the Earthboy’s family is also ghosted as the narrator states, “It was called the Earthboy place, although no one by that name (or any other) had lived in it for twenty years” (Welch 1). The narrator hints that the Earthboy’s bloodline has left behind no historical trace of ever existing. In addition, the cabin has been isolated for twenty years and there is no evidence of a younger generation. The narrator’s early descriptions of the Earthboy cabin mirrors the Gothic stereotype of American Indians as vanished figures. Furthermore, the narrator’s limited knowledge about the history of the landscape and Earthboy family reflects his own internalization of “Indians” as invisible in the present day.
Throughout *Winter in the Blood*, Native women hold important places in society and are necessary for the narrator’s journey of self-discovery as well as recovery of Blackfeet culture and masculinity. Welch’s representation of Native women reverses the common Gothic convention of the ghosted or vanishing Indian. The narrator admits to feeling distance and acknowledges his lack of connection to his female relatives, however, his distance from his mother and grandmother stems from his distance from his tribal roots: “I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon. And that is why I had no particular feelings toward my mother and grandmother. Or the girl who had come to live with me” (Welch 2). In this passage, the narrator implies that in order to feel connected to the Native women in his life, he needs a better understanding of where he comes from, which also implies that women are less displaced than he is. Being as distant “as a hawk from a moon” also indicates that the narrator is grappling between two separate identities, viewing himself as a member of two distinct nations rather than one.

Rather than existing solely in the backdrop of *Winter in the Blood*, I argue that Native women are introduced with very strong presences and are vital to the survival of the Blackfeet tribe, which reverses traditional representations of Native women as ghosted subjects in American literature.

Native women take on the roles of lone survivors in *Winter in the Blood* and appropriate gendered Gothic conventions that portray Native males as the last of their tribe. Early on in the novel, the protagonist hints that many of the traditional Blackfeet men have been outlived by Blackfeet women. The narrator states, “On the hill behind the cabin, a rectangle of barbed wire held the graves of all the Earthboys, except for a daughter who had married a man from Lodgepole. She could be anywhere but the Earthboys are gone” (Welch 1). The novel begins with the graves of all of the Earthboys, suggesting that traditional Blackfeet males were once connected to the earth and are no longer alive. Furthermore, the daughter, who “could be
anywhere,” is portrayed as the only survivor of all of the Earthboys, which reverses constructs of Native males as the lone survivor in traditional Gothic representations. The daughter, as “the last of the Earthboys,” is also a symbol of reproductive capacity for the Blackfeet tribe because survivance of the Blackfeet bloodline solely depends on her decision and ability to have children, as she is literally described as the last of the tribe. Survival of the Blackfeet tribe is thus dependent on the Native maternal bloodline which doubly reverses traditional American Gothic tropes that represent Natives as extinct and women as invisible. The description of the Earthboy’s daughter marrying a man from Lodgepole also implies that Blackfeet women were forced to marry outside of their tribe in order for their bloodline to continue. This foreshadows the women of the novel who abandon Blackfeet men by seeking men outside of their tribe, as well as the fear Native men have of being silenced.

Throughout Winter in the Blood, Welch uses the imagery of fish to symbolize the colonial ghosting of Blackfeet culture and biological reproduction of Native peoples. Early on, the narrator refers to his girlfriend, Agnes, as a “fish for dinner, nothing more” (Welch 18). The representation of Agnes as a fish symbolizes fertility. As Alan R. Velie argues, the fish in Winter in the Blood are connected to the Arthurian Fisher King legend, where the Fisher King is often wounded in the groin, which causes his country’s lack of fertility (“The Use of Myth” 91). Like the Fisher King, the narrator is also wounded and spends a lot of time fishing but has no luck. Shortly after discovering Agnes has left him, the narrator goes fishing but his lure gets caught and the fishing line snaps (Welch 6). Just as Agnes, “the fish for dinner,” has left the reservation, the narrator is unable to catch any fish from the river, even though it is stocked with pike. The narrator recalls, “The white men from the fish department came in their green trucks and stocked the river with pike . . . But the river ignored the fish and the fish ignored the river; they refused to
even die there. They simply vanished” (Welch 4). The white men force fish into the river, which causes the fish to disappear rather than procreate. This echoes the vanishing descriptions of the traditional Earthboys who were forced onto the reservation but are no longer visible to the narrator. Furthermore, the lack of fish in the river is a metaphor for the shortage of reproductive capacity for the Blackfeet tribe, as Native women like Agnes seek men off of the reservation. The narrator’s unsuccessful attempts of catching fish are connected to his sense of emasculation, which is tied to his loss of Blackfeet culture. In addition, his failure to actually see the fish mirrors the way he has internalized the colonial lens that marks Native peoples as invisible.

Welch incorporates dreams about fish in Winter in the Blood to show how the narrator is haunted by the past of colonial genocide, which reverses traditional Gothic tropes that portray non-Native Americans as haunted by the “savage Indian.” The narrator dreams of his mother:

The gutted rainbow turned into the barmaid of last night screaming under the hands of the leering wanted men. Teresa raged at me in several voices, her tongue clicking against the roof of her mouth. The men in suits were feeling her, commenting on the texture of her breasts and the width of her hips. (Welch 42).

The gutted rainbow “screaming under the hands of leering wanted men” suggests that the men are sexual threats who are violently imposing themselves onto the fish. In addition, the fish being “gutted” insinuates that all of the internal body parts are completely taken out, thus disabling “the fish” to procreate. In Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, Dee Brown provides a detailed chronicle of the violent destruction of Native Americans by white conquerors during the second half of the nineteenth century. One of these historical records include white cavalry men desecrating bodies of dead Native women and wearing their ovaries on their hats: “men had cut out the private parts of females and stretched them over the saddle-bows and wore them over their hats while riding in the ranks” (Brown 90). The narrator’s dream of the “gutted fish” echoes the cavalry men who violently desecrate Native female bodies in Brown’s historical account.
Furthermore, Teresa screams in “several voices,” which symbolizes the voices of many Native women who have been victims of sexual violence and silenced by the dominant colonial society. In addition, the men are described as “feeling her, commenting on the texture of her breasts and width of her hips” and view Teresa as a sexual object because she is a Native woman. Teresa is hyper-sexualized by the men in the dream which supports Andrea Smith’s claim, that colonizers mark Native peoples by their “sexual perversity” and thus consider them to be sexually violable (Smith 10). The narrator’s dream mirrors his fear of the annihilation of biological Blackfeet reproduction due to the violent past of colonial genocide. Furthermore, the narrator is haunted by non-Native men who are represented as violent threats as they mutilate the “gutted rainbow” and sexualize Teresa, thus reversing Gothic representations of non-Native peoples being haunted by “savage Indians.”

Welch also provides survival for American Indians by ghosting non-Native men. The narrator’s grandmother, also known as “the old lady,” takes on the role of the lone survivor by marrying a man, who is not identified as belonging to her Blackfeet tribe. The narrator recalls that his grandmother married “a half-white drifter named Doagie” but he also states, “I couldn’t remember his face” (Welch 30). The memory of Doagie’s image is literally ghosted in the narrator’s conscious, even though he was a part of the narrator’s life. Although Doagie is referred to as the “half-white drifter,” he is never identified as being Native. Furthermore, the narrator’s grandmother ghosts Doagie’s existence, as the narrator recalls she “never mentioned him, for fear the image of Standing Bear would die in me” (Welch 30). The narrator also reveals that Standing Bear was his grandmother’s first husband, who was Blackfeet and killed in a raid on the Gros Ventres (Welch 29). While Standing Bear’s cause of death is revealed, Doagie’s cause of death is silenced. Doagie’s family background is also never revealed and the narrator
only identifies him through the affiliation he had with his grandmother. While the narrator is led to believe that Doagie was his “real grandfather,” he is doubtful as to whether or not this is true. The narrator states, “Teresa was their only offspring. And it was questioned whether Doagie was her real father or not” (Welch 30). Welch ghosts Doagie’s identity by making his race, background, and family relations ambiguous. In doing so, the Blackfeet bloodline of “the old lady” survives while Doagie’s non-Native bloodline remains ghosted.

Welch also ghosts non-Native paternal bloodlines of mixed-raced characters living on the Fort Belknap Reservation, as seen with Raymond Long Knife. Raymond Long Knife’s father is never mentioned throughout the novel and all that is revealed is that “Long Knife came from a long line of cowboys” (Welch 19). Although it is revealed that Raymond Long Knife came from a long line of cowboys, none of the cowboys’ names nor racial backgrounds are disclosed. Furthermore, the actual name “Long Knife” is a term used to refer to whites and associates the family name with the Blackfeet oppressors that killed both Yellow Calf’s and the narrator’s grandmother’s families (Welch 28). Coming from a long line of cowboys, Long Knife is radically displaced on the Fort Belknap Reservation. Through these subtle hints, it is implied that Long Knife’s paternal bloodline is non-Native and that Raymond Long Knife, himself, is a mixed-blooded Native American. Furthermore, the only bloodline that survives in Long Knife’s family is his mother, Belva’s. Belva is Long Knife’s only relative who is identified as well as given a first name. Welch ghosts non-Native paternal bloodlines of mixed-blooded American Indians, thus making Native maternal bloodlines vital to the survival of the Blackfeet tribe.

Native women fill the void of traditional Blackfeet men on the Fort Belknap Reservation with their strength and economic power, as many of the Native men are displaced in contemporary American society and feel emasculated. For example, Long Knife is only
respected by society because of his mother’s strong reputation. Although Long Knife comes from a long line of cowboys, he fails to get his job done on the reservation. He also has the reputation for being “shrewd in the way dumb men are shrewd,” but is in “constant demand” because he is “Belva Long Knife’s son” (Welch 19). Similarly, the narrator’s mother, Teresa, marries Lame Bull, who is only described as being a success after he inherits her land: “And, of course, he had married Teresa, my mother. At forty-seven, he was eight years younger than she, and a success. A prosperous cattleman” (Welch 10). Lame Bull is not considered prosperous until he marries Teresa. Furthermore, Lame Bull fails to complete his job on the reservation just as Long Knife does: “Lame Bull had broken two teeth on the bull rake and screwed up the hydraulic lift” (Welch 20). Long Knife and Lame Bull are both radically displaced on the Fort Belknap Reservation. Their displacement on the reservation is a reflection of the decline of traditional Blackfeet men.

By taking on the roles of lone survivors, Belva’s and Teresa’s strength and economic power mirror traditional matriarchal tribal roles; however, Native men view Native women through internalized Western patriarchal gender constructs that ghost traditional Native roles. In The Sacred Hoop, Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) argues that traditionally, many tribal lifestyles are gynocratic rather than patriarchal (2). Allen states, “Among gynocratic and gynocentric tribal peoples . . . the centrality of powerful women to social well-being is unquestioned” (The Sacred Hoop 3). Although the Native men in Winter in the Blood admire Native women for their strength, they also view them as masculine. For example, the narrator describes Belva as the best “cowboy” of them all (Welch 19). Although the narrator speaks as though he respects Belva’s abilities, his description of Belva as a cowboy insinuates that she is one of the men. Similarly, the narrator speaks about his mother’s physical appearance and states,
“Although never beautiful, she was a woman who had grown handsome, more so each year- First Raise had been the first to notice this trend” (Welch 26). The narrator considers Teresa to be “handsome” rather than “beautiful” after hearing his father refer to her this way. Native men view Native women from an internalized patriarchal lens that is based on universal male dominance and the ghosting of traditional matriarchal roles. According to Allen, colonizers have sought to teach Natives to view their tribes through a patriarchal lens that convinces “both men and women that a woman’s proper place was under the authority of her husband and that a man’s proper place was under the authority of the priests” (Allen 38). The Blackfeet men on the Fort Belknap Reservation internalize Western patriarchal gender constructs that place Native women and Native men below white men. As a result, Native men refer to strong Native women as masculine rather than traditionally feminine.

Although Belva’s “masculine” abilities impress the narrator, her aggressive actions represent resentment from Native women towards the Native men who have removed themselves from Blackfeet tradition. This is seen as she takes part in the castration of calves:

In the makeshift pen, she wrestled calves, castrated them, then threw the balls into the ashes of the branding fire. She made a point of eating the roasted balls while glaring at one man, then another- even her sons, who, like the rest of us, stared at the brown hills until she was done. (Welch 19).

The removal of male genital parts symbolizes the issue of male infertility and thus the shortage of traditional Blackfeet men. Furthermore, before the Blackfeet were forced to move onto the Fort Belknap Reservation, they lived in the surrounding hills on the boundaries of the reservation land. As Yellow Calf later reveals, many of the men, including his father, died in those hills due to starvation, massacres from the U.S. soldiers, and illnesses during the Starvation Winter (Welch 121-122). While Belva eats the male genitalia of the cattle, the men stare at the brown surrounding hills where many of the Blackfeet died. This symbolizes the loss of Blackfeet men
and women during the Starvation Winter, where it is estimated over 500 Blackfeet people starved to death (Blackfeet Reservation). Furthermore, Belva shows that she holds power over the Native men, who are incapable of fulfilling action, as she aggressively glares at them while eating the genitalia from the cattle. Belva’s aggression mirrors her resentment towards the Native men’s emasculation which is a direct result of the removal of Blackfeet tradition. As Native female characters, like Belva, resent and defy Native men for their lack of action, Welch subverts Gothic representations of Native men as solely victims of colonization, showing that it is up to the Native men as individuals to decide if they are going to simply be victims or be responsible for their own actions.

The narrator regains a secure sense of his Blackfeet culture and masculinity after discovering that his Blackfeet ancestry and history of the land surrounding the Fort Belknap Reservation has been ghosted by the dominant non-Native society. After the narrator learns about his family history through Yellow Calf, who hints at being his grandfather, the “dead and empty” land becomes re-populated with not only an ancestral past, but a felt ancestral force that continues to live. The narrator discovers that his grandmother was abandoned by her Blackfeet band during the Starvation Winter, but that Yellow Calf helped her survive (Welch 122). Yellow Calf points towards the river and exclaims, “This was where we camped. It was not grown over then . . .” (Welch 120). When the narrator learns that his family history has been silenced by the dominant society, his ancestors that were once invisible suddenly become visible. The narrator states, “And we shared this secret in the presence of ghosts, in wind that called forth the muttering tepees, the blowing snow, the white air of the horses’ nostrils” (Welch 125). Being in the “presence of ghosts,” is suddenly described as a felt force that continues to surround the reservation. The “muttering tepees” indicates sounds of voices and the “blowing snow” describes
the snowy Starvation Winter that the narrator can finally see and feel. The Fort Belknap Reservation becomes an uncanny territory after the narrator learns the truth about his Blackfeet history. As Freud states, the uncanny is “the species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (Freud 124). Welch re-ghosts what had formally been perceived as a dead and empty land with a history of Blackfeet ancestry that continues to survive. Ghosts thus have a double role in Winter in the Blood; while they initially symbolize cultural invisibility, they symbolize cultural continuity as the narrator gains a true sense of his Blackfeet identity.

Welch inverts traditional American Gothic conventions in order to write against the literary genocide of American Indians and provide survivance for the Blackfeet tribe. By ghosting non-Native paternal bloodlines, Welch turns popular representations of Native females as invisible subjects into uncanny figures as they maintain strong presences, are integral for Blackfeet survival, and fill the void of displaced Native men who are the last to regain a secure sense of Blackfeet identity. In addition, Welch re-populates the dead and empty land surrounding the Fort Belknap Reservation with Blackfeet ancestry and turns historical places of colonial contact into uncanny territories as he provides a voice for the Blackfeet people. Through his manipulation of American Gothic tropes, Welch decolonizes western constructs that negatively affect the narrator’s sense of masculinity. He provides an empowered sense of Native identity by showing that Native men and Native women will continue to hold strong places in contemporary American society.
CHAPTER TWO:
LURKING PASTS, TRIBAL TWISTS, AND TERRIFYING AMERICAN MYTHS:
DE-FAMILIARIZING THE MONSTER IN GHOST SINGER

In the novel *Ghost Singer*, Anna Lee Walters (Pawnee/ Otoe-Missouria) critiques and questions the notion of who is deemed monstrous through her careful application and manipulation of American Gothic tropes. *Ghost Singer* presents various types of characters as monsters, including the monsters of society otherwise known as Western colonizers, anthropologists, and historians who have taken ownership of Native American histories, creating fictional Indian constructs in the process. In addition, ambiguously monstrous characters that appear as ghostly Indian figures violently harm and kill members of the dominant society. In this chapter, I argue that Native American characters are represented as constructive signifiers in *Ghost Singer* and provide survivance as they actively keep their history alive and deconstruct notions of the “absolute fake” Indian, or *indian*. Furthermore, Anna Lee Waters inverts traditional racial dynamics of the American Settler Gothic, as white anthropologists are signified as monstrous others who attempt to keep histories buried and hold Native American bodies captive, an inversion made possible through the recovery and survivance of ghostly maternal Native American bloodlines.

Reclaiming the Past: The Function of Ghosts in Indigenous Gothic Texts

Similar to James Welch’s novel, *Winter in the Blood*, *Ghost Singer* exposes a significant issue that remains today: the absence of contemporary Native American voices in the national American narrative. Welch’s novel utilizes Gothic tropes that are recognizable per conventional understandings of the American Gothic but Walters engages more directly with what scholars term the Indigenous Gothic. In discussing *Ghost Singer*, scholars have addressed the authority of
the imperial gaze, the dominant role the museum has in articulating a national identity, as well as the mysteries of sacred artifacts and Native human remains. In this chapter, I expand on the existing scholarly conversation of *Ghost Singer* by analyzing how Walters inverts the traditional American Gothic tale and appropriates Gothic Indian ghosts in order to deconstruct national narratives that dehumanize American Indians. In “‘Resting in Peace, Not in Pieces’: The Concerns of the Living Dead in Anna Lee Walters’s *Ghost Singer,*” Rebecca Tillett argues, “the monstrous [in *Ghost Singer*] is situated within the power and agendas of academia; within the construction of ‘national’ history through the silencing of minority voices, and the consequent power and authority assumed by ‘legitimate’ or legitimating historians . . .” (86). Furthermore, the Smithsonian Museum in *Ghost Singer* acts to legitimate the imperial project of the nation state (Tillett 87). By presenting characters who hold opposing views about the recording of history and its purpose, Walters questions accepted notions of authenticity and reliability. Euro-American characters such as Drake, who shares a name with the historical sixteenth century European explorer, Sir Francis Drake, privileges recorded history and academics, while Native characters like Jonnie Navajo lack formal Western education and rely on oral history (Hulme 139). *Ghost Singer* exposes academic prejudices that view oral histories as illegitimate and unreliable. As Tillett points out, *Ghost Singer* presents a challenge to dominant modes of perception (Tillett 93). I agree with Tillett’s assertion that by making a connection between museum collections and imperial trophies of genocide, Anna Lee Walters addresses and challenges the authority of the “imperial gaze” that pervades the hierarchies of the observer in history, anthropology, and museology (Tillett 87,88). In addition, I argue that *Ghost Singer* provokes a response from the reader, encouraging its audience to challenge the rhetorical devices
that have articulated an American national identity and continue to justify the nation’s imperial project.

Much of the scholarship on the traditional American Gothic genre has argued that the figure of the American Indian remains central to sources of anxiety, guilt, and trauma. Many of America’s popular Gothic writers including Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, and William Faulkner developed a uniquely American national literature by representing Native Americans as spectral figures of the past. In “Indian Ghosts and American Subjects,” Renée Bergland argues, “For more than three hundred years, American literature has been haunted by ghostly Indians” (1). Furthermore, by representing Native Americans as threatening subjects that are doomed to vanish, early American writing helped to reinforce the political Indian Removal (“Indian Ghosts” 3). American Gothic depictions of ghostly and demonic Indians helped to construct the common stereotypes of American Indians as objects of melancholy, loss, homelessness, and death. In addition, while Euro-Americans take possession of Native American lands, Native Americans vanish into the minds of their colonizers, haunting the frontier and thus the backdrop of American literature. As American Indians are ghosted in American Gothic literature, so are Native American writers. In “The Haunted American Enlightenment,” Bergland states, “ghostly Indians are most central to the formation of American national identity” and are “manifestations of the central anxieties and pleasures of American nationalism” (48). Anna Lee Walters confronts this ghosting tradition and uses Gothic tropes in a way that reclaims identity and talks back to history for contemporary Native Americans.

In Cultural Haunting, Kathleen Brogan argues that ghosts in contemporary American ethnic literature function to identify and revise the cultural past. Brogan states, “The ghost gives body to memory, while reminding us that remembering is not a simple or even safe act” (Brogan
29). Brogan calls these hauntings *cultural hauntings*, where ghosts explore hidden passageways not only of the individual psyche, but also of a people’s historical consciousness (Brogan 5). Furthermore, cultural continuity is achieved in the course of cultural hauntings. Through the agency of ghosts, group histories that have been threatened, erased, or fragmented are recuperated and revised (Brogan 6). In considering both Bergland and Brogan’s theories on Native American ghosts in Gothic literature, I argue that Anna Lee Walters incorporates cultural hauntings in *Ghost Singer* to lead to a valuable awareness of how the past of settler colonialism continues to inhabit and inform the living for both non-Native and Native American people, therefore turning popular representations of Indian subjects into uncanny figures. Furthermore, Anna Lee Walters uses cultural hauntings to provide a narrative that both engages with and fights back against the colonial discourses that continue to inform the national American imagination, making her novel, *Ghost Singer*, an act of survival.

In “Is there an Indigenous Gothic?” Michelle Burnham argues that in contrast to American Gothic texts, written by non-Natives, Indigenous Gothic texts have been less often recognized by scholars and even less frequently discussed (226). According to Burnham, Indigenous cultures and histories of storytelling in the Americas were already populated by Gothic elements, in a literary and cultural tradition that predates both the importation of European Gothic into the Americas and the arrival of Europeans in the Americas altogether (Burnham 227). Burnham also argues that although the canon of popular American Gothic texts typically begins with the writings of Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allen Poe, Native tribal cultures have traditionally used Gothic elements in stories of windigos, witches, and ghosts that predate European contact (Burnham 226). Contemporary American Indian authors invert American Gothic conventions through
cultural hauntings that explore the roots of traditional tribal stories and renew tribal cultures. Burnham also argues that there is a difference between Settler Gothic and Indigenous Gothic. While Settler Gothic represents features that form a national identity through depictions of triumphant yet guilty histories of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, American Indian authors reclaim the Gothic by writing back to such treatments and silencing the dominant non-Native society (Burnham 228). Part of what distinguishes Indigenous Gothic texts from their Euro-American counterparts is the haunted space between the living and dead. While haunted spaces are still represented as terrifying in Indigenous Gothic, they are also crucial because they help preserve and value the past, bringing the dead into dialogue with the living (Burnham 233). Furthermore, ghostly presences are symbols of Native American resistance and must be tolerated rather than conquered or eliminated (Burnham 233). As Burnham argues, Anna Lee Walters uses standard American Gothic conventions and simultaneously turns them inside out by incorporating Native American protagonists in “Indian country” who are haunted by American imperialism and capitalism, and therefore driven to expel the destructive results caused by them (Burnham 228). Native American characters in *Ghost Singer* are more often portrayed as experiencing fear and terror rather than causing it.

Part of the terror that haunts Native American characters in *Ghost Singer* is the mystery of tribal identities and missing links to ancestry caused by colonialism. In “Solving Mysteries of Culture and Self: Anita and Naspah in Anna Lee Walters’ ‘Ghost Singer,’” Melissa J. Fiesta argues that *Ghost Singer* differs from conventional mystery novels because the plot does not revolve around a single mystery, but rather multiple mysteries (370). Many of the mysteries in *Ghost Singer* are multi-dimensional, interrelated, and remain unresolved. Furthermore, most of the characters in the novel confront at least one mystery of their own. While the Anglo characters
become obsessed with mysteries that should not concern them, including American Indian remains and sacred artifacts, Native American characters appreciate the mysteries of life. As a result, white curators become frustrated by their own efforts to solve mysteries, while Native American characters accept that not all mysteries can be resolved and express reverence for all phases of life (Fiesta 371). In addition, when Anglo characters attempt to invent a solution that does not quite solve the mysteries of the past, they fail, go crazy, and die. While I agree with Fiesta that Anglo characters have different epistemic beliefs than American Indian characters and that both groups’ approaches to mysteries are very different in *Ghost Singer*, I maintain that the concept of mysteries should be further examined as it relates to gender, Western patriarchal ideals, and traditional Gothic ghosting tropes. In this chapter, I argue that colonialism ghosts Native American maternal bloodlines in *Ghost Singer* through poorly documented histories and patriarchal national laws. Furthermore, Native men are at the heart of recovering the mystery of Navajo ancestry through their survival of colonial contact and preservation of oral histories. Through these depictions, Walters re-ghosts American national narratives that represent Indians as vanished subjects of the past.

Anna Lee Walters’ (Re)construction of the Monster in *Ghost Singer*

The active presence of Native American ghosts and the dominant society’s fear of their vengeful return is a theme that runs throughout *Ghost Singer*. Indian artifacts and body parts are collected in the Smithsonian Museum in isolation from real tribal people, only to be objectified and dehumanized as colonial subjects. Furthermore, human remains are dismembered and fragmented, just as tribal cultures have been decontextualized from the dominant society. For example, when the Native character, George Daylight, sees the “coiled strings of human ears hanging on a nail above [Donald’s desk],” he asks, “Where’s the rest of those people?” (Walters
The Anglo curator, Donald Evans, responds, “Never thought about that” (Walters 129). The fact that Evans never even thinks about the rest of the bodies that the ears have physically been detached from shows that he completely disassociates any type of human connection to these pieces. As a result, living Native Americans are disassociated from the artifacts as well. Although the ears are from multiple human bodies, they are all “coiled together,” just as contemporary Native Americans have been grouped together as one monolithic culture in Euro-American manifestations. Through these representations, *Ghost Singer* challenges the ethics and moral values of anthropology and academia, while at the same time exposing real issues that have affected contemporary Native American identities, whose ancestors and cultures have literally been consumed by the dominant society. What is considered “settled” in the national narrative of American Gothic therefore becomes very unsettling in *Ghost Singer*.

Rather than solely serving as trophies of genocide in *Ghost Singer*, the secret collection of Native American body parts and artifacts do have agency. Geoffrey Newsome grotesquely violates human remains as he “plays with a necklace of twenty human fingers” and occasionally even wears it; however, when he realizes that the “full scalp with the ears attached” is missing, he reminisces on the time he “had tugged at the hair, intrigued by the scalp’s resilience to his touch, his rough and careless handling, as well as its resistance to time” (Walters 42, 43, 44). Although these body parts are violated and disrespected by the touch of the colonial gaze, they have agency as they disappear and reappear, unaltered. Time has no effect on these remains and they haunt those who attempt to possess them, not only by disappearing and reappearing, but also by their lingering smells. When Willie unwraps the cloth covering the Navajo scalp, an odor drifts from the cloth and remains on his fingers (Walters 50). This smell also never leaves the
memory of the elder, Wilber, who admits to feeling the spirit people and smelling something at the top of the Smithsonian: “I ain't never seen it with the eye, but I felt and smelt it” (Walters 77). Rather than being a static artifact, the Indian ghosts in *Ghost Singer* can be felt through their lingering living senses.

Anna Lee Walters also shows that artifacts and human body parts are resilient to decay and colonial corruption, just as Native American peoples and tribal histories will continue to be. In “Grinning Aboriginal Demons,” Louis Owens argues that in traditional paradigms of the American Gothic, “the American Indian finds him/ herself imprisoned as a static artifact within the discourse of the American myth” (72). Furthermore, “Without the Indian as a static referent, the threat to the white psyche would remain unacceptably disembodied and amorphous, internalized and unsignified” (Owens 72). Native American ghosts refuse to remain static and do not have a clearly defined form in *Ghost Singer*. Artifacts, body parts, and ghosts disappear and reappear, while frightening Anglo curators. While collected body parts refuse to remain locked up in the Smithsonian Museum, self-preservation is a crucial theme in *Ghost Singer*.

Walters’ novel provides crucial decolonizing commentary about museums in a manner similar to Gerald Vizenor in his novel *The Heirs of Columbus* because both works include protagonists who free human remains from museum collections and return them to tribal communities. It is important to note that *The Heirs of Columbus* was published in 1991, which was a year after the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted (“What is Repatriation?”). Repatriation is a process in which Native American artifacts and remains that have been collected by museums are returned to lineal descendants and affiliated tribes. The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History currently lists eligible cultural items to be returned as: “human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of
cultural patrimony” (“What is Repatriation?”). The terms, “objects of cultural patrimony,” specifically address an inheritance from one’s own father or male ancestor, disregarding any links to female ancestors. Here, in an existing national law, Native American women are ghosted and gender is ignored. In considering the Repatriation Act of 1990 and the patriarchal rules that are ascribed to it, the protagonist in *The Heirs of Columbus*, Felipa Flowers, is portrayed as a trickster character who gives Native women agency by rejecting European imperialism. Felipa is described as a “trickster poacher” who “repatriated hundreds of sacred tribal medicine pouches, masks, creatures, ceremonial feathers, bones, and [who] has liberated the stories of the shamans from museums and colonial dioramas” (Vizenor 50). With the help of Transom, a “tribal tent shaker,” Felipa repatriates four medicine pouches as well as a silver casket that contains the remains of Christopher Columbus (Vizenor 61). Although Felipa eventually dies, her body is returned along with Pocahontas’ and Christopher Columbus’ (a cross-blood per Vizenor’s novel) and all remains are protected in the “House of Life” (Vizenor 176). Not only are two female bodies returned, but the proper burial of Pocahontas is also important because she is a matriarchal figure. Vizenor empowers Native American women and gives purpose to matriarchal ancestors by inverting the rules associated with repatriation acts that ascribe patriarchal ties as the one and only link that connects descendants to human remains.

In both *Ghost Singer* and *The Heirs of Columbus*, Indigenous body parts are dehumanized by the dominant society who tries to possess them as souvenirs, however, gender is addressed very differently. In *Ghost Singer*, Native women do not have as much agency as the Native American male protagonists nor do their bodies return to the communities they have been stolen from, as they do in *The Heirs of Columbus*. Instead, Native American male protagonists are the ones who liberate tribal identities in *Ghost Singer* while acknowledging the importance of
the ghosted Native women. For example, Willie is concerned about the mystery of his missing grandmother and explains to Jonnie Navajo, “But as long as we don’t know what happened to the lost child, we are missing a part of our history” (Walters 245). When Jonnie responds, he is not so much concerned about recovering the stolen grandmother for existing Navajo descendants. Instead, he suggests that the Navajo creation myth has the power to heal and will give the descendants of kidnapped Navajo women the strength to overcome the “odds” they have been dealt. Jonnie states:

That we exist, that we are here, this is the one thing that cannot be refuted. Don’t confuse yourself with thoughts that lead you off the path. Live! Despite all the odds against it, let us live the best way that we can! Take care of yourself, and then these other things will straighten themselves out, the old man said. (246).

Although the mystery of the stolen grandmother remains, Jonnie suggests that it will one day be solved and that Navajo survival depends on descendants, like Naspah and Willie, to know who they are and to take care of themselves. In sharing the story of Willie and Naspah’s “stolen grandmother,” Jonnie also provides hope that descendants “may come home yet” (Walters 247). Through Jonnie’s character, Walters conveys the message of self-preservation and resurrects the Indian slave history that has been ghosted by the dominant society. Furthermore, by not fully recovering the mystery of Willie and Naspah’s Navajo grandmother, Walters emphasizes that the history of Indian slavery haunts Americans, regardless of race.

The larger issues in Ghost Singer are connected to repatriation of not only Native American bodies but of tribal ancestry that has been hidden from contemporary Native Americans. In Ghost Singer, three generations of Navajo women grow up with ghosted familial ties and thus ghosted bloodlines. When Anita is first introduced, she is revealed as having paternal Spanish ancestry, and is unaware that she is also part Navajo from her maternal ancestry. Furthermore, Anita’s mother, Rosa, is described as not knowing anything about her
mother or father (Walters 34). When Rosa reflects on the memory of Maria, her secret birth-mother, she concludes that she never knew what tribe Maria belonged to (Walters 35). In addition, Maria is described as being a “distant, shadowy figure” that looked after Rosa from a distance (Walters 35). The descriptions of Maria are ghostly, which can be seen as a metaphor for cultural invisibility, but also cultural continuity. Right before Rosa dies, she realizes she was Maria’s daughter all along: “Maria was my mother, Anita . . . I didn’t know it until today . . .” (Walters 37). Rosa rediscovers who her mother is shortly before becoming a “ghost,” herself, thus recovering her Native maternal bloodline.

Maria’s cultural identity is literally a ghost that haunts but also restores Native identities in Ghost Singer. In Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature, Kathleen Brogan states, “the ghosts in stories of cultural haunting are agents of both cultural memory and cultural renewal: the shape-shifting ghost who transmits erased or threatened group memory represents the creative, ongoing process of ethnic redefinition” (12). Although Maria is literally ghosted as a character and is described as a “shadow,” the mystery of her Indigenous blood haunts and eventually restores the identities of Rosa and Anita, her only known living descendants. In “The Haunted American Enlightenment,” Bergland states, “In public discourse, the birth of the American nation and the death of the Native American were as closely related as light and shadow” (40). In Ghost Singer, Maria’s shadow, although a threat to American national identity, inverts the notion that Native Americans exist solely in the past. As Anita solves the cultural mystery that haunted both her mother’s life and her own, she embodies hope that American Indians can rediscover the ancestry that has long been denied by the dominant society.

Anna Lee Walters also warns her readers to use caution when accepting perspectives as facts by contradicting the recorded history that ghosts Maria’s ancestral past with Jonnie
Navajo’s oral stories. Anita only learns that Maria was “most likely Navajo” from Beth Williams, whose grandfather adopted Maria (Walters 103). From Beth’s version of the story, Maria never knew she was Navajo and was only told that she was Indian throughout the span of her life (Walters 104). The reader learns from Jonnie Navajo, however, that Maria was Red Lady’s child. Furthermore, Jonnie Navajo reveals that Red Lady was stolen from her Navajo family, was an Indian slave for over three years, and that both Red Lady and Maria were sold to separate non-Native families when Maria was just a baby (Walters 63-64). The Indian slave trade that occurred in New Mexico during the nineteenth century had its roots in the Spanish colonial period; after colonizing New Spain, Spanish settlers held Native Americans captive and forced them into slavery (Iverson 26-27). Throughout Ghost Singer, the past of Indian slavery haunts the dominant non-Native society as Anglo characters, like Beth, attempt to bury the history of the Indian slave trade. Bergland states that African slavery is a specter that traditionally haunts American Gothic texts (“Indian Ghosts” 7). Walters uses American Gothic conventions, however, to expose the less widely known historical traumas of the Indian slave trade.

Furthermore, Anglo characters, like Beth, insist that Maria’s origins can never be known for certain and rely solely on historical written records that ghost Native histories. Beth states, “what I have told you is all written down” (Walters 106). Maria’s Navajo descent becomes ambiguous as Beth goes from admitting that her mother told her, “Maria was actually a Navajo Indian” to stating, “[Maria] didn’t know for sure that she was Navajo. We don’t even know that now” (Walters 103, 104). Maria’s parents, tribal roots, and identity are all ghosted through the narrative of the dominant American society. In addition, Rosa’s father, who is Anita’s grandfather, is completely ghosted and no one claims to know who he is (Walters 105). Rosa’s only known bloodline is uncovered by her relation to her mother, Maria, who is “Indian” and
“most likely” Navajo. Throughout *Ghost Singer*, invisible Native maternal bloodlines are a direct result of the active shaping of history by non-Natives who exclude Native peoples and the violent colonial past from the American national presence.

Spanish colonialism also ghosts Anita’s Native bloodline. Before Anita discovers Maria is her maternal grandmother, she is only aware of her Spanish heritage from her father, Santiago. As Brogan states, “The ghost that makes present the past while conveying its indefiniteness provides the vehicle for both a dangerous possession by and an imaginative liberation from the past” (Brogan 11). Both Spanish and Anglo ethnicities have a dominant hold over Indigenous blood relations in *Ghost Singer*; however, Navajo descendants are liberated as the mystery of familial ties comes to surface. Navajo ancestry can therefore be seen as a threat to the dominant society in *Ghost Singer* as blood relations are ghosted through three generations of Native American women. In addition, Rosa and Anita’s cultural identities are ghosted specifically through the missing link of their maternal bloodline, which echoes the issues of repatriation connected to paternal ties. Native women are therefore victims of American colonialism, Spanish colonialism, as well as repatriation in *Ghost Singer*.

As Native American ghosts, artifacts, and ancestries remain resilient to decay in *Ghost Singer*, their reappearances symbolize a return of tribal cultures that never fully vanished in the first place. Cultural hauntings are not only embodied through ancestral bloodlines, but also in artifacts that mark a past over which one has little control. As white curators attempt to possess Native American artifacts, Walters critiques history and the notion of ownership. Donald Evans and Geoffrey Newsome, who only view American Indians as relics of the past, attempt to “[sort] out fragments of history together, and [make] the pieces fit into something they both understand” (Walters 40). In this way, the museum mirrors a prison that hides Indigenous’ perspectives of
colonization in order to “protect” the larger society from doubting dominant voices in a fragmented American history. This also is seen as items are described as being “kept separate from the other Indian collections downstairs because of their highly controversial nature-controversial mainly to American Indians” (Walters 44). Ironically, hidden artifacts and human remains become the most controversial and problematic, not for American Indians, but for individuals who attempt to reconstruct them.

Characters who attempt to deny the past and consume tribal cultures run the danger of being consumed by Native American ghosts who physically appear as monsters. In Monster Theory: Reading Culture, Jeffrey Cohen argues, the monster is a cultural body and “an embodiment of a certain cultural moment- of a time, a feeling, and a place” (4). While Native ghosts take on the physical appearance of monsters, they aim to reclaim and recover violent pasts by demanding tolerance. Anglo curators who ignore the fact that Native Americans exist in the present day are punished by Indian ghosts for their ignorance as well as disrespect for Native American traditions. For example, Jean Wurly falls down a flight of stairs after admitting to David Drake that she’s seen Indian ghosts; Geoffrey Newsom is driven to suicide after he finds a sack of human bones in his apartment; and, Donald Evans becomes increasingly paranoid after confronting the ghost singer (Walters 43, 212). Those who fail to see the living power contained in these sacred items are severely punished. Native ghosts become uncanny characters and signifiers in Ghost Singer as they are driven to monstrous acts while simultaneously demanding recognition and tolerance from Western colonizers who attempt to possess them and define their tribal past.

While conventional elements of the Gothic, such as hauntings, family secrets, imprisonments, and encounters with ghosts are present in Ghost Singer, they all play a different
literary role than they do in traditional American Gothic novels. Although ghosts externalize repressed thoughts, they are also used to recover tribal histories that continue to be poorly documented and even erased. The actual survival of Native American ghosts, as well as the inclusion of the Indigenous perspective of colonial contact, suggests that historical accounts of colonial progress are, in themselves, just another form of fiction. Dominant non-Native colonial narratives become uncanny as Indigenous stories provide access to a past that becomes very real, but also quite different than historical versions. For example, David argues that the reason he cannot solve the mystery of the Navajo family’s lost grandmother is that no records of the slave-raid actually exist and that “without records, there is no history” (Walters 198). In contrast, Jonnie Navajo does not see any need for records and is unquestionably a historian for the Navajo people (Walters 181). David and Jonnie have opposing epistemic views; Navajo knowledge does not depend on written accounts but rather stories in the blood (Walters 122). Jonnie Navajo suggests that the Navajo creation myth has the power to heal even in modern times. The younger generation must reconcile this cultural ideology with dominant discourses in the modern day.

Repressed anxieties about hidden ancestries and tribal histories is reflected throughout *Ghost Singer* as Anglo curators obsess over medicine bundles, mummified bodies, and body parts, and never consider that living descendants are connected to these objects. After Donald Evans assumes that the objects come from extinct tribal cultures, George Daylight asserts that the sacred collection is alive: “The People who created these things exist- they’re still here! . . . Also like people, these creations have characteristics and a nature. As long as these articles exist, these characteristics, this nature, and their power are embodied in that creation” (Walters 127). While Evans privileges a linear timeframe that places American Indians in the past, Daylight asserts that the artifacts serve as a vital connection between past and present generations.
Furthermore, repressed anxieties about ancestry and tribal connections to artifacts is reflected when characters like Willie consider, “Like the other things that have been hauled away from us-the pottery, the mummies, the medicine bundles- [our stolen grandmother] was taken too . . . Maybe she has descendants somewhere, close by or far away. They may not know that they are Navajo” (Walters 247). Walters deconstructs the dominant society’s justification for acquiring sacred objects in museums by revealing the collections as a colonizing effort that distorts history and prevents Native Americans from knowing who they really are.

Anthropologists who only try to make sense of the sacred collection in the Smithsonian through a linear conceptualization of time also fail to understand that tribal stories and histories are embodied in the artifacts. In “The Ceremonial Motion of Indian Time,” Laguna Pueblo Scholar, Paula Gunn Allen, suggests that “Chronological organization . . . supports allied western beliefs that the individual is separate from the environment . . . that life is an isolated business, and that the person who controls the events around him is a hero” (Allen 149). As Anglo curators use a linear conceptualization of time, they separate Native American characters from the environment as well as sacred objects. For example, Geoffrey Newsome disregards Native American cultures and the life that exists within the artifacts, claiming the attic as his own personal territory (Walters 40). In doing so, Newsome takes on the “hero” role, that Allen describes, as he attempts to control American history by reconstructing Native American artifacts. As a result, he becomes a prime target for the revenge of the ghost singer. Walters reveals that the dominant culture’s linear history needs to be deconstructed and that acceptance of orally communicated tribal knowledge is the only way to survive for people who come into contact with Native American ghosts and artifacts.
For many Native American cultures, the return of ancestor spirits ensures continuity between the past and the present. In his text, *The Names*, N. Scott Momaday explains how the imagining of a dead grandfather he never knew “came to be imagined posthumously in the going of the blood … invested the shadow of his presence” (Momaday 26). The ghosts that remain alive in the blood serve as a vital connection between generations and replace what experience and memory, alone, cannot provide. In *Ghost Singer*, spiritual elements bond Native American artifacts with individuals and the communities from which they come. For example, Naspah learns the significance of the dress that has been handed down to her from the stories passed down from Johnnie Navajo: “It was the only thing that [Red Lady] carried back to Beautiful Mountain when Tall Navajo brought her back” (Walters 66). Furthermore, after Naspah returns from Washington, she finally realizes how important the stories in her blood are, feeling “a deep sense of belonging to the purple mesas and the blue mountains . . . it had to do with touching a part of herself that she hadn’t reached before” (Walters 243). Naspah realizes that she is a part of the mountain just as her Indian ancestors who “make up the mountain” (Walters 65). Life exists within the sacred objects and the landscape as they bind people of the past to existing tribal descendants, and restore stories in the blood.

Traumatic tribal pasts also insist on survival in *Ghost Singer* through the recovery of genealogies that are embedded in the land. Alienated protagonists must discover traditions by learning the forgotten meaning of important places. For example, Naspah learns that Red Lady and her family used to live in the same location where she is currently living (Walters 62). After Naspah learns that Red Lady was kidnapped along with her child, she discovers that the Navajo landscape is a sacred place that holds a history of colonial violence, including the scalping of White Sheep (Walters 63). Furthermore, Naspah has a different perception of the landscape that
surrounds her as she learns that the bones of her ancestors are secretly scattered throughout the peak where she often herds sheep: “Just below it is where the old man, Tall Navajo, is buried, in the cliff, in the rocks . . . somewhere near that place . . . Tall Navajo’s son, is also buried. Red Lady is between us and the peak. My father, Hosteen Diné, is buried near ‘the winged rock’ . . . The rest of our people are scattered out over this mountain” (Walters 65). When Naspah learns of her family history, she remarks, “the books don’t say that. They say something else” (Walters 61). Specific territories that were once places of violent colonial contact, Navajo slave raids, and Indian captivity prisons are not recorded as such by anthropologists. Walters inverts traditional Gothic tropes by ghosting American history written by non-Natives, and thus provides a vehicle for Naspah’s spiritual catharsis through the stories of her grandfather. This manipulation of Gothic tropes evokes a sense of Freud’s uncanny, “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar,” as landscapes and histories that were once familiar become unfamiliar when repressed truths are revealed (Freud 124). By reimaging the sacred mountains with the presence of ancestral graves, Naspah has a better sense of who she is as a Navajo female. The land is thus portrayed as a felt force, a link to the past, and a support for Navajo identity in Ghost Singer.

Native American bodies are only considered safe when they are secretly buried and kept hidden from the dominant society. In Sacred Land Sacred View: Navajo Perceptions of the Four Corners Region, Robert McPherson states, “As with most things in the Navajo universe, there resides in the sites or artifacts a sacred power which should not be disturbed” (99). Through the historical accounts that are told by Jonnie Navajo, the landscape of Native America is revealed as being haunted by dangerous Anglo American imperialists who continue to disturb sacred artifacts, bodies, and sites. The actual bodies of Indigenous people being held at the Smithsonian
Museum can be seen as victims being held in captivity, which also reverses traditional themes of Indian captivity narratives told by dominant colonial voices, where Native Americans have served as monstrous others, such as Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative of 1682. In his essay, “The Face of the Tenant: A Theory of American Gothic,” Eric Savoy posits that “the entire tradition of American gothic can be conceptualized as the attempt to invoke ‘the face of the tenant’- the specter of Otherness that haunts the house of national narrative” (13, 14). Savoy’s analysis of the house focuses on the roles of the house in traditional American Gothic texts, ranging from the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Stephan King. If we think about the land as being a house that belongs to its landlord (being the Indigenous people) and the Smithsonian Museum being a secret captivity closet where tenants hide stolen property as well as the physical bodies of their landlords, then the identities of the tenants and landlords change in ways that radically invert traditional racial dynamics of the American Gothic. Colonists are portrayed as unwelcome, monstrous tenants in the Native American home, whose presence haunt and violate the Native American narrative. The Native American narrative is thus revealed as being haunted by the past it incorporates; the conventional monstrous other of Gothic fiction takes the form of dangerous imperialists in *Ghost Singer* who haunt the landscape of Native America. Rather than solely being figures of psychological disturbance, Indigenous ghosts engage with the discourses of American Settler Gothic, where the Indigenous perspective of over 500 years of colonization in the Americas has been ignored. In this way, Anna Lee Walters gives contemporary Native America a voice in *Ghost Singer*.

Throughout *Ghost Singer*, American Indian ghosts shock urban territories, wreck havoc in the closets of government homes, warn of disaster and death, and impart wisdom to their descendants. By manipulating American Gothic tropes in a way that casts the dominant society
as a monstrous other, Anna Lee Walters provides an uncanny narrative that becomes a form of resistance, persistence, and survival for Native Americans. She also offers a critique of American history as documented by predominantly white historians and questions the imperialist agendas of anthropology and its influence on contemporary Native American stereotypes. In doing so, she provides a less heroic version of American settlement by using Gothic conventions in order to reverse non-Native representations of the *ghosted Indian*. Furthermore, the hauntings of Native American ghosts become a metaphor for the historical consciousness in *Ghost Singer*, and actively inhabit and inform the living. Although Indian ghosts are portrayed as monstrous figures, they retaliate against colonial treatment and refuse to be conquered and eliminated by the dominant society, which is revealed as the real monstrosity throughout *Ghost Singer*. 
CHAPTER THREE:
RESISTING WESTERN PATRIARCHY: UNDERSTANDING EARLING’S RHETORIC OF SURVIVANCE THROUGH INDIGENOUS FEMINISM AND THE GOTHIC

Perma Red is Debra Magpie Earling’s (Salish) first novel and has gained very little scholarly attention since it was published in 2002. Earling is an enrolled member of the Salish tribe, however, she grew up in Spokane, Washington (Lankford). After dropping out of high school at the age of fifteen and returning to the Flathead Reservation, Earling began to learn Salish family stories that involved her aunt Louise, a relative she never met (Lankford). Although Perma Red is considered to be fiction, the text is based on multiple stories about Earling’s aunt that continue to circulate the Flathead Reservation. In an interview with Indian Country Today (2002), Earling reveals that her aunt Louise lived a short life and was constantly on the run. Furthermore, Louise died at the age of twenty-three after being involved in a car accident with two white men (Lankford). Earling’s family stories maintain that after Louise’s body was removed from the wreckage, she was presumed dead and covered with a blanket; however, she was still alive (Lankford). Furthermore, she fought for her life and received no medical assistance from the responding sheriff and two men involved (Lankford). Although fiction, Perma Red retells an important story of a Salish woman, whose memory remains alive on the Flathead Reservation. Throughout this chapter, I argue that Earling’s text provides survivance for contemporary Native Americans as the “fictional” Louise resists and survives Western patriarchy.

Like Winter in the Blood, Perma Red can be described as a coming-of-age novel. The novel follows the life of Louise White Elk, a young Salish woman growing up on the Flathead Reservation, during the 1930s and 1940s. Many of Salish characters endure violence, poverty,
starvation, alcoholism, and feelings of emasculation on the Flathead Reservation. The Salish characters are also taught to see history, culture, and progress through a distorted colonial lens. In this chapter, I argue that Earling strategically uses the medium of fiction in order to address and critique the ways in which Native men and Native women internalize Anglo colonial rhetoric. I also argue that Salish men of the novel are portrayed as more susceptible to assuming Western patriarchal gender roles in *Perma Red* as opposed to the Salish women living on the Flathead Reservation. Furthermore, Earling deconstructs Western assaults on tribal gender structures by manipulating American Gothic ghosting tropes in order to erode colonialist ideologies that devalue the Salish and their past. In doing so, she ghosts non-Native paternal bloodlines and gives agency to Native maternal bloodlines. Although Earling addresses cultural colonization, Earling’s text ultimately emphasizes Native survivance because she underscores dominant colonial discourses that attempt to turn Native Americans into relics of the past and defies them.

Throughout this chapter, I refer to Gerald Vizenor’s (Anishinaabe) theories of survivance in order to show how Earling challenges popular notions of the constructed Indian. One of the principle drawbacks of Vizenor’s theoretical work on survivance is that he doesn’t fully address the intersection of gender with tribal narratives. Indigenous feminist theories are therefore useful lenses through which to identify the complex politics of gender representation in *Perma Red* that stem from constructed notions of *indian* along with the effects of Western patriarchy more generally defined in relation to American Indian identities. In *Perma Red*, gender oppression for both men and women stems directly from Western patriarchy and the lasting effects of colonization.
Western Patriarchy: “A Problem for Us All”

Indigenous feminisms are not monolithic and cannot simply be reduced to a binary between feminist or non-feminist. Before discussing Indigenous feminist theories, it is important to understand how they are different from Western feminisms. Feminists began identifying and protesting patriarchal structures in Western societies in the middle of the 19th century. Feminisms in the United States have since progressed through three distinct waves. The first wave began in the late 19th century with the women’s suffrage movement and was generally propelled by white, middle class women. This movement lasted from 1890 to 1920 and culminated in the passage of the 19th amendment to the United States constitution, giving women the right to vote (Foner 617). Legal reform and suffrage were some of the main concerns for feminists during the first wave. Activists also sought to subvert expectations of women as “angels in the house” (Tyson 90).

The second wave of feminism in the United States began in the late 1960s and continued into the 1990s. The main goals of the second wave included eradicating discrimination against women in the workplace, politics, and law, and challenging the traditional roles of men and women (Foner 797-799). During this phase, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues and feminists sought to fight the oppression of women under male patriarchy (Rivkin and Ryan 765). Much of the second wave was also focused on passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution to guarantee social equality, regardless of sex (Foner 797). Feminists of the second wave were also concerned with misogynistic stereotypes represented in literature, as well as reconstructing history to include contributions specific to women (Showalter 5-6). Disagreements also arose among feminists over whether “womanhood” was constructed by male patriarchal language or if it was an innate “essence” (Rivkin and Ryan 765-767). Whereas the
first wave of feminism included primarily white, middle class women, the second phase drew in some minority women and claimed that women’s struggle was a class struggle. Finally, the third wave of feminism in the United States emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s and expanded into broader justice movements for workers and immigrants. The third phase also refuted dualistic thinking and destabilized many constructs, such as notions of “universal womanhood,” gender, sexuality, and hetero-normativity (Mack-Canty159).

Indigenous feminists expand upon Western feminisms by recognizing the negative effects of patriarchal systems in Indigenous communities. Not all Indigenous feminists, however, share the same ideas about what feminism and Indigenous activism means. In “Thoughts on Indian Feminism,” Nakoda scholar Kathryn Shanley argues that many Native American women misunderstand feminism and are therefore reluctant to associate themselves with the “majority women’s movement” (213). While Shanley recognizes that Native and non-Native women activists agree on issues including equal pay for equal work, children’s health and welfare, reproductive rights, and domestic violence, she also recognizes important issues specific to Native women, including the dedication to promote tribal sovereignty (“Thoughts on Indian Feminism” 214). Shanley states:

Thus, the Indian women’s movement seeks equality in two ways that do not concern mainstream women: (1) on the individual level, the Indian woman struggles to promote the survival of social structure whose organizational principles represent notions of family different from those of the mainstream; and (2) on the societal level, the People seek sovereignty as a people in order to maintain a vital legal and spiritual connection to the land, in order to survive as a people. (“Thoughts on Indian Feminism” 214).

In Shanley’s view, a significant difference in the struggle for equality for Indigenous women and mainstream women in the United States is the promotion of sovereignty for Native nations. Shanley also claims that many feminists during the second wave attempted to redefine the
nuclear family in ways that Native American women had already long known. She argues, the patriarchal American lifestyle from which white middle class women were fighting to free themselves from had not taken its hold on American Indian communities (“Thoughts on Indian Feminism” 214). Furthermore, non-Native mainstream feminist voices have replaced the voices of American Indian women who have been fully capable of speaking for themselves (“Thoughts on Indian Feminism” 214). Although Indigenous feminists share some similar goals with mainstream feminists, Shanley asserts that Indigenous feminisms must be recognized as powerful in their own right (“Thoughts on Indian Feminism” 215).

Similar to Shanley, Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) argues that many tribes are traditionally feminist and part of decolonizing efforts includes reclaiming that belief. In *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, Allen recognizes that not all Native women are happy with an Anglo feminist analysis that excludes Indigenous communities and describes her critical approach to American Indian Studies as “tribal-feminism” or “feminist-tribalism” (222). In addition, Allen argues that traditional tribal lifestyles are more often gynocratic and are never patriarchal (*The Sacred Hoop* 2). Allen states, “Western studies of American Indian tribal systems are erroneous at base because they view tribalism from the cultural bias of patriarchy and thus either discount, degrade, or conceal gynocratic features or re-contextualize those features so that they will appear patriarchal” (*The Sacred Hoop* 4). Allen also claims that mainstream feminisms could benefit from the awareness that successful gynocratic societies have already existed and can therefore exist again (*The Sacred Hoop* 213). Allen argues, Iroquois women came from societies in which women shared equal power with men and were sources of inspiration for the first wave of the American feminist movement, yet many Anglo feminists are not aware that such societies existed (*The Sacred Hoop* 212-213). Though
The Sacred Hoop has been a seminal work of Indigenous feminism, one of Allen’s downfalls is that she assumes all tribal cultures are traditionally gynocratic. In Custer Died For Your Sins, Vine Deloria warns, “. . . many ideas that pass for Indian thinking are in reality theories originally advanced by anthropologists and echoed by Indian people in attempt to communicate the real situation” (82). It is important to not overgeneralize tribal traditions. Although many tribes are traditionally matriarchal, not all of them are, thus making Indigenous feminism complex to define.

Although Indigenous feminists identify and resist patriarchy in Indigenous communities today, several Indigenous people resist and challenge any forms of feminism, believing the word “feminist” is synonymous with “white” and is an imperial project that betrays Native communities. In her 2009 article, “From the ‘F’ Word to Indigenous/Feminisms,” Salish scholar Luana Ross expresses the common frustration among Native peoples with the failure of mainstream white feminists to address issues specific to Native women. Reflecting back on her experiences at the first national conference on Native women held in 1981, Ross notes that primarily white women were addressing Native women’s issues and that the conference was very assimilationist, creating a divide between reservation women and “urban Indian women” (Ross 44). Although Ross expresses dissatisfaction with “white feminism,” she seeks to build a bridge with non-Native feminists, claiming that mainstream feminist efforts have contributed to the resurrection of various Native women’s societies (Ross 46). Ross notes that because of these various societies, feminism and its definitions remain in transition (Ross 46). Ross also argues that since Native nations share a transnational relationship with each other, the United States, and other countries, that “transnational feminism” must always take into account the continuing reality of colonialism for Native women (Ross 47-48).
Not all Native women scholars who focus on Indigenous women’s rights claim to be feminists; some Native women describe themselves as *tribalists* while others avoid being labeled entirely. In their essay, “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in North America,” Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey claim that Native American activists who identify as feminists are most often those whom have assimilated (331). In addition, Jaimes and Halsey state that Native women who have openly identified themselves as feminists have “tended to be generally accepting of the colonialist ideology that indigenous nations are now legitimate sub-parts of the U.S. geopolitical corpus rather than separate nations, that Indian people are now a minority with the overall population rather than the citizenry of their own distinct nations” (Jaimes and Halsey 331). Jaimes and Halsey also argue that most Native women activists who avoid identifying themselves as “feminists” reject feminist politics altogether in efforts to support sovereignty. Jaimes and Halsey posit that alienation from feminism provides the potential for alliances with “other women of color, founded not merely to fight gender oppression, but also to struggle against racial and cultural oppression” (Jaimes and Halsey 333-334). Similarly, in *Indigenous American Women*, Devon Mihesuah (Chickasaw) argues that some Indigenous women view feminism as a white-dominated theory that is supported by Anglo women who are ignorant of their own dominant place in society. Mihesuah states, “[Many traditional Native women] usually have no interest in white feminist theory, because they have witnessed white women enjoying the power privileges that come with being white at the expense of women of color” (Mihesuah 160). Mihesuah also notes that some Native women believe that while they might be oppressed because of their gender, they are primarily disempowered because of their race; therefore, it is more important to eradicate racist oppression than sexist oppression (Mihesuah 160).
In her essay, “Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging,” Renya Ramirez (Winnebago) disagrees with claims made by Jaimes, Halsey, and Mihesuah, and states, “race, tribal nation, and gender should be non-hierarchically linked as categories of analysis in order to understand the breadth of our oppression as well as the full potential of our liberation in the hope that one day, we can belong as full members of our homes, communities, and tribal nations” (23). While many scholars have privileged race and tribal nation over gender, Ramirez argues for a greater inclusion of Native women’s issues in struggles for Native sovereignty (Ramirez 23). Ramirez asserts, “Native women who suffer from sexual violence must too often confront male-dominated tribal councils, governments, and communities” (Ramirez 26). Ramirez also adds that tribal sovereignty should be re-conceptualized from Native women’s perspectives in order to recognize and address gendered violence and to make tribal governments more inclusive (Ramirez 30). Ramirez states, “rethinking sovereignty from Native women’s viewpoints can lessen this tension between Western notions of tribal sovereignty and Native women’s gender rights” (Ramirez 30). Rather than being ignored, Ramirez believes that gender must be linked to discussions of tribal sovereignty in order to address the reality of violence against Native women (Ramirez 35).

Andrea Smith has also been very influential in Indigenous feminist theory and argues that what affects Native women affects the whole Native community and that race, gender, and sovereignty cannot be separated in order to combat colonial and sexual violence (Smith 137-138). In *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Smith claims that sexual violence serves as a tool of genocide, colonialism, and gender oppression and that the present absence of Native American people in the dominant colonial imagination reinforces the idea that American Indians are vanishing and the conquest of Natives is justified (Smith 8-9). From this
perspective, violence against Native women both stems from and echoes historical colonial violence against entire Native communities. Smith also asserts that prior to colonization many Indigenous societies were matrilineal and that in order to subjugate Indigenous nations, colonizers who were both misogynistic and patriarchal realized they had to subjugate women within these nations, marking them as inherently “rapable” (Smith 23). In addition, Indigenous lands and territories have also been marked as violable. Smith states, “The colonial/patriarchal mind that seeks to control the sexuality of women and indigenous peoples also seeks to control nature” (Smith 55). Smith links this colonial/patriarchal obsession to control Native peoples and thus Native lands to Western development projects that have occurred on and near Indian reservations, including hydroelectric dams, uranium production, oil drilling, military and nuclear testing, and uncontrolled toxic waste sites that have led to environmental destruction and threatened human health (Smith 55-57).

While Indigenous feminisms are very complex, in this chapter I examine the ways in which Debra Magpie Earling addresses the effects of Western patriarchy on the Flathead Reservation in *Perma Red*. Throughout the novel, Native men and Native women navigate a patriarchal world in ways that are distinct from each other. By analyzing how the novel represents the psychological effects of colonialism on both Salish men and Salish women characters through an Indigenous feminist lens, this chapter shows how the damaging effects of Western patriarchy are not always visible as physical violence, nor are Native women the only ones to be oppressed. In this chapter, I argue that Earling’s text supports the Indigenous feminist claim that Western patriarchy “is a problem for us all,” by showing how the characters Baptiste Yellow Knife and Charlie Kicking Woman both resist and perform Anglo masculinity (St. Denis
Furthermore, I argue that Salish men are more susceptible to internalizing negative patriarchal gender roles than the Salish women in the novel.

Decolonizing Western Patriarchy in *Perma Red*

Throughout *Perma Red*, many of the Salish characters have a colonized view of their culture and are influenced by negative “savage” stereotypes engrained by the dominant non-Native society. In *The Voice in the Margin*, Arnold Krupat writes, Euro-Americans have “sought to establish their own sense of American ‘civilization’ in opposition to some centrally significant Other, most particularly to the Indian ‘Savage’” (3). In other words, the dominant non-Native society constructs the widely accepted worldviews of “American civilization” and “Indian savage” in order to create an “us-versus-them” binary and have control over Native peoples. Throughout *Perma Red*, colonial forces attempt to rid the Salish of their customs by engraining a sense of “American civilization” that opposes Native traditions. For example, when the Salish children attend the Mission School, Sister Simon explains that her important role is to “civilize” and save the Natives from their “terrible” ways. Sister Simon states, “I am here to liberate you from the darkness of superstition” (Earling 20). Sister Simon teaches the Salish that their traditions are evil in order to instill fear of their own tribal culture. When the Salish children are frightened by the thought of their traditions being evil, she tells them to “wake up to the world” (Earling 20). The notion of “waking up to the world” insinuates that the Salish culture has no value in “civilized” America. Furthermore, Salish traditions are represented as invalid and something that only exists in the past. As a result, Salish characters are taught to view themselves as well as the rest of their tribe through a distorted colonial lens.

As Salish characters develop a distorted colonial lens they reproduce the xenophobic fear Anglos have about Native cultures. For example, the Salish view the male character, Baptiste
Yellow Knife, as dangerous because of his tribal knowledge and traditional ways. The Salish character, Grandma Magpie, warns Louise White Elk that “[Baptiste] is the last of our old ones, and he is dangerous” (Earling 5). Baptiste’s tribal knowledge is considered foreign to the rest of the tribe and is therefore a threat to Natives who internalize the codes of their oppressors. Baptiste is also described as sharing a close relationship with the spirit world, knowing stories that “no one but the eldest elder knew but he knew the stories without being told” (Earling 4). His close connection to the spirit world and tribal knowledge gives him the kind of authority that colonial forces try to rid. This power includes the ability to foretell death, use medicine to manipulate others, and command rattlesnakes to attack enemies. For example, as a young child, Baptiste predicts the death of Old Macheese, Louise’s great-grandmother, after seeing a salamander (Earling 7). Salamanders are traditional warnings in *Perma Red* that indicate a future death (Earling 7). Reflecting on the day that Old Macheese died, Louise realizes that Baptiste could “see and hear things that other Indians could not” (Earling 5). Louise is initially fearful of Baptiste because he preserves tribal knowledge and is the last of the Salish men who still values tradition.

The Salish characters also disparage Baptiste for his tribal knowledge by constantly emphasizing his darker skin complexion. For example, when Baptiste foretells Old Macheese’s death, Louise observes, “He had two white splotches clouding his face and still he was the darkest Indian [she] had ever seen, a beaver-dark boy who stood with a strange certainty [she] recognized even then was trouble” (Earling 6). Although Baptiste has “two white splotches” on his face, Louise still considers him to be “the darkest Indian.” The darkness of Baptiste’s skin is a metaphor for his resistance to assimilation and is portrayed as a negative quality by characters who view him through a distorted colonial lens. Furthermore, Baptiste’s “strange certainty”
represents confidence in his Salish identity. As a young child, Louise sees Baptiste as the “darkest Indian” because she associates his tribal ways with the negative connotations of “darkness” and “evil” that are taught at the Mission School. Baptiste’s “dark” skin complexion is also reiterated when the Salish male character, Charlie Kicking Woman, notes that Baptiste will never pass for a white person because he is a “black Indian” (Earling 188). The emphasis on Baptiste’s dark skin complexion is portrayed as a negative quality by Natives who internalize Western patriarchy, because it is associated with Natives who resist adopting colonial ideologies. Baptiste, as “the darkest Indian” and “black Indian,” represents a time before colonial contact challenged Salish traditions. As a result, he is portrayed an outsider to both his tribe and the dominant Anglo-American society.

Baptiste also deconstructs the colonial lens by appropriating the biblical *John the Baptist*, a major religious figure in Catholicism. When the Ursuline nuns who run the Flathead Reservation boarding school attempt to teach the American Indian children that their traditional ways are wrong, Baptiste is the only character who openly resists them. Baptiste’s open rejection to the Ursuline nuns shows when Sister Sebastian taunts him by calling him “John the Baptiste,” specifically because he will not be swayed by her negative opinions of American Indians (Earling 127). Rather than rejecting the name, “John the Baptiste,” Baptiste “[stands] up gracefully, with purpose, with an arrogant dignity that suggest[s] he knew more than the giggling students, knew more than Sister Sebastian” (Earling 128). As Sister Sebastian angrily reacts by slapping two erasers in Baptiste’s face, he does not move (Earling 128). Instead of showing any sign of anger or pain, Baptiste appropriates the religious figure, *John the Baptist*, with “the face of a beautiful warrior whitened for battle” and abandons the Catholic school (Earling 128). In doing so, Baptiste resists substituting Catholic values for his own Salish traditions.
Earling’s appropriation of the name, John the Baptiste, also challenges colonial ways of seeing. The biblical *John the Baptist* is known for recognizing Christ, and thus seeing “true” faith. Baptiste resists seeing the world through a distorted colonial lens by resisting the nuns at the Mission School and accepting the name, John the Baptiste, thus claiming the ability to “truly” see. Furthermore, he sees himself in ways that are different from the rest of the Salish tribe who internalize Western patriarchal ideals. Alan R. Velie states, although many American Indians belong to some sect of Christianity today, traditionally their religions were part of their tribal cultures (Velie 78). Furthermore, trickster characters, like Baptiste, challenge colonial ways of seeing and substitute traditional Native values for those of Western religions (Velie 78). By appropriating the biblical *John the Baptist* with “a face of a beautiful warrior,” and turning a moment of mockery into an act of defiance, Baptiste becomes a trickster character and a symbol of resistance to the colonial power.

Baptiste gains a reputation for being powerful on the Flathead Reservation through his close ties to his Salish mother, Dirty Swallow. Dirty Swallow’s power is described as a felt spiritual force, also known as “rattlesnake power” (Earling 5). Dirty Swallow’s rattlesnake power protects tribal knowledge and enforces Salish tradition. For example, when Louise initially denies a traditional marriage with Baptiste, Dirty Swallow threatens that someone in Louise’s family will get bit if she does not agree to marry him (Earling 16). Shortly after, Louise’s sister, Florence, is bit by a rattlesnake. After Florence gets bit, Louise suddenly has flashbacks of Sister Simon claiming that Native traditions are irrational, stating “Snakes won’t bite our enemies because we tell them to” (Earling19). Dirty Swallow’s power proves the nuns wrong as she commands the snake to attack Florence in order to warn Louise. Although the snake bites Florence, she still survives. When the tribal sheriff, Charlie, attempts to help Florence, he recalls
that he had never heard of an Indian dying from a snake bite, however, “A white man from Thompson Falls got the bite about eight years ago. Poison clutched his heart. He died” (Earling 25). Dirty Swallow’s snakes become uncanny figures, “the species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar,” as they react differently to Natives and non-Natives (Freud 124). While non-Natives are killed and ghosted by snakes, Natives are warned by snakes and survive their bite, which inverts the Gothic trope of the vanished Indian. Furthermore, Dirty Sallow uses her power with snakes to protect the Salish tribe from the dominant colonial society and to enforce Salish tradition. The idea of “tradition” becomes uncanny as Dirty Swallow’s rattlesnake power contradicts Sister Simon’s claim that Salish traditions are invalid and that snakes will not bite enemies because they are told to. While the dominant non-Native society tries to teach the Salish children that their traditional beliefs are not real, Salish characters who experience Dirty Swallow’s power understand that the Catholic nuns are wrong and are frightened by Dirty Swallow’s strength.

Although the Salish fear Baptiste because of his close connection to Dirty Swallow, they also feel protected by her power. For example, when Baptiste decides to leave the Catholic school, the Salish students hope for him to return with Dirty Swallow: “And all that day the students listened, not to Sister Sebastian and the rap of her geography stick, but for Baptiste Yellow Knife to return with his mother, to return with the power they had all lost” (Earling 129). While Baptiste has authority at the Mission School, it is implied that he does not have power without his mother’s strength. Baptiste’s masculinity is therefore connected to the close ties he has with his mother, which also reflects Paula Gunn Allen’s claim that traditional tribal lifestyles are matriarchal (The Sacred Hoop 2). The power that is “lost” after Baptiste abandons the school symbolizes the power of the Salish people before colonial contact challenged their traditions.
Furthermore, Louise expresses that she feels protected by Dirty Swallow’s power after marrying Baptiste and never questions this power. Louise realizes, “No one could hurt her now. She had married the son of Dirty Swallow” (Earling 132). Baptiste is constantly identified by the strength of his mother, rather than his own. Dirty Swallow’s strength and power over the Salish community reiterates Allen’s claim that in traditional tribal societies, “the centrality of powerful women to social well-being is unquestioned” (The Sacred Hoop 3). In Perma Red, strong Native maternal bloodlines are imperative for the survival of Native masculinity as well as Salish culture.

Baptiste’s defiance against Native cultural genocide both unnerves and impresses the other Salish characters. For example, when Baptiste resists assimilating into the white society at the Mission School, other Salish characters view him as masculine. When Louise reflects on Baptiste’s encounter with Sister Sebastian, she “recall[s] how Baptiste sat like a man that day at his small desk” (Earling 127). Furthermore, when Baptiste returns to the boarding school after resisting the nuns, the other Salish characters notice that “He became a man,” but he also “became an Indian who was not afraid of being Indian, the worst kind, the kind nobody liked, neither the Indians nor the whites, the kind of Indian who didn’t care if he was liked” (Earling 129). The type of “Indian” that “nobody liked” is represented as the type of American Indian that is both confident in his identity as a Native male and loyal to his Native traditions. As Andrea Smith argues in Conquest, American Indian boarding school systems serve as a patriarchal tool for cultural genocide (36). Baptiste is represented as the “worst kind” of Indian in the eyes of Natives who internalize Western assaults on tribal gender structures, because he refuses to assimilate into white society and abandon his Salish culture.
Baptiste advocates that the Salish resist Indian constructs and return to their old Salish ways when he performs traditional dances at powwows. The character Charlie states, “[Baptiste’s] quill scalp spined upward toward all of us like the needles that stitched our blood . . . We all focused on Baptiste by keeping our distance. A circle formed around him by the absence of other dancers” (Earling 149). The absence of other dancers surrounding Baptiste reiterates Grandma Magpie’s early assertion that Baptiste is “the last of [the] old ones,” isolating him further away from his contemporary society. The other Salish characters feel unity and pride as they watch Baptiste perform alone at powwows, because colonial forces have attempted to ghost these traditions. Charlie states, “The dancers stopped to recognize the clear light that surrounded Baptiste when he chose to honor the old ways. We looked at him with the dust of the dancing day, everyone it seemed in love with all that Baptiste was in lightning seconds” (Earling 149). Baptiste embraces traditions, which connects him closer to the “spirit world.” For many Native American cultures, ancestral spirits that remain alive in the blood ensure continuity between the past and the present. In *The Names*, N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) describes how his mother’s memories are his very own, as they remain alive in the blood. Momaday states, “This is the real burden of the blood; this is immortality” (Momaday 22). The spirits that remain alive through the blood serve as vital connections between Native American generations and replace what memory, alone, cannot provide. Baptiste’s presence and traditional performances are described as a force that literally “stiches” the Salish blood, implying that he, as “the last of the old ones,” preserves the trauma and experiences inherited in the blood. In this way, Baptiste can be seen as a trickster who connects past ancestors to the present and therefore ghosts dominant colonial discourses that aim to rid the Salish of their old ways.
Western patriarchy becomes emasculating to Salish men when they react to discrimination in ways that are self-destructive. Although Baptiste constantly battles the intrusion of white dominance on the Flathead Reservation, his acts of resistance are self-destructive when he turns to alcohol as an outlet for his anger. Louise observes, “Baptiste Yellow Knife was another man when he was drinking . . . When Baptiste Yellow Knife got drunk he was mean” (Earling 95). When Baptiste turns to alcohol as an outlet for his frustration against Western patriarchy, he becomes “another man” and is feared by Louise because of his violent ways. He also has the reputation with Natives and non-Natives for “disturbing the peace” in the local Dixon Bar (Earling 113). Baptiste’s violent, drunken character mirrors the stereotypical indian that he tries so hard to resist. As Vizenor argues, the indian is the simulation of colonial dominance that casts Native Americans as the “drunken savage” (Manifest Manners 29). Baptiste cannot escape colonial dominance and stereotypical constructs of American Indians as “drunken savages,” even as he goes to get his “fix” of alcohol, because he is constantly reminded that he is Other as he is forbidden to enter bars. Charlie states, every bar in Montana has a sign that says, “NO DOGS OR INDIANS ALLOWED” (Earling 113). The laws and signs that forbid Natives to enter Montana bars cast American Indians as something other than human by comparing them to dogs, thus reiterating the savage indian stereotype. Baptiste resorts to alcohol as an escape from the racist views non-Natives have of Natives; however, his acts of defiance against Western patriarchy become self-destructive as he becomes the stereotypical violent “drunken savage” that outsiders expect.

One of the most powerful symbols of Western patriarchy on the Flathead Reservation is Harvey Stoner, who uses his wealth as a tool to dominate Native men and devalue Native women. Harvey Stoner is known for “[making] his money off poor Indians selling their
Stoner seeks to control the Flathead Reservation by owning so much of the land that the Salish call it the “Stoner Reservation” (Earling 115). Stoner’s control and ownership over the Flathead Reservation supports Smith’s claim that in order to control Native peoples, colonizers realized they had to subjugate both Native women and Native lands, marking them both as violable (Smith 55). Furthermore, Native men feel inadequate compared to Stoner, because he has sexual encounters with Salish women who are already married to Native men. Charlie observes, “Harvey Stoner had slipped into our bedrooms with a grin on his face” (Earling 147). Although the Salish women are already married to Native men, Stoner views them as sexual objects, supporting Smith’s claim that Native women have been marked as violable. Furthermore, Native women view Stoner as their only way out of poverty, as he bribes them with his money. Louise realizes, “Harvey Stoner could take her far from here” (Earling 139). Louise views Stoner through what Mary Louise Pratt defines as imperial eyes, a colonial gaze that reinvents peoples and landscapes with prospects of vast expansionist possibilities, technology, commodities, and new systems of knowledge (Pratt 112). Stoner embodies a patriarchal world where masculinity is linked to materialism, the devaluation of Native women, and dominance over Native men.

White dominance over Native men on the Flathead Reservation leads to the systematic abuse of Native women. As Emma LaRocque (Métis) states, “Aboriginal men have internalized white male devaluation of women” (qtd. in St. Denis 47). Baptiste internalizes Western patriarchy and becomes destructive when he gets drunk and takes his personal frustrations of white dominance out on Louise’s body. After he discovers Louise is having an affair with Harvey Stoner, “Baptiste crack[s] his hand to the crown of her skull” and “hit[s] her hard, hard enough to wake her up and set her to sleep again” (Earling 154, 155). Baptiste’s abusive
reactions to white dominance supports Smith’s claim that violence against Native women both stems from and echoes colonial violence against entire Native communities (Smith 9). Although many of the Native characters admire Baptiste for embracing tradition and the power he shares with Dirty Swallow, they fear him when he becomes the stereotypical “violent savage.” Louise compares Stoner to Baptiste and realizes, “There was no distance [Stoner] couldn’t cross, no place he wasn’t welcome. She thought of Baptiste, how he could make himself welcome too, with his fist and his hard words rinsed by alcohol” (Earling 137). White dominance over Native men fuels Baptiste’s destructive and violent behavior. Furthermore, Stoner attracts married Native women, like Louise, who view their husbands as reckless and powerless. Earling’s text supports LaRocque’s claim that although some tribes are matriarchal, this does not mean that matriarchies prevent Native men from oppressing women (qtd. in St. Denis 47). Through Baptiste’s destructive acts of resistance, Earling shows that Native peoples need to address the oppressive behaviors they have internalized in order to fully become decolonized.

Baptiste’s cousin, Charlie Kicking Woman, also internalizes colonial oppressive behaviors as he views Louise through a colonized lens that marks Native women as violable. As Smith argues, in order to subjugate Indigenous communities that were traditionally matriarchal, colonizers realized they needed to subjugate Native women, marking them as inherently “rapable” (Smith 23). Charlie is a tribal officer who internalizes the colonial lens that marks Native women as sexual objects. After Baptiste abuses Louise, Charlie decides to take his “chance” with her when she is at her very weakest. Charlie takes Louise to a hotel room as a place for safety, but later demands her to undress in front of him. Charlie states, “I had told Louise to do a hundred things as an officer of the law, now I was telling her as a man to stand in front of that shade, to undress for me slowly, one piece at a time, her summer-faded dress, her
single shoe” (Earling 163). As a tribal sheriff, Charlie does not protect the Salish community, but rather uses his job as a way to emulate his oppressors by taking advantage of Louise when she is in her most vulnerable state. Charlie is self-aware of his oppressive behaviors and feels ashamed for his sexual intentions with Louise, however, he pursues her anyway. Charlie states, “I felt suddenly ashamed to be chasing her, no different from Stoner or Yellow Knife, my desire as visible as sunrise” (Earling 161-162). Through these negative depictions of Charlie, Earling does not make an excuse for his actions, but instead shows that Native men should be held responsible for the way they choose to respond to negative influences and abuse Native women.

Charlie also has conflicted views on what it means to be “masculine” as he internalizes American mainstream views about Native people in ways that are different than Baptiste. Charlie reflects on previous years before becoming a tribal officer and admits that he felt like a “man” when he built a coffin for Annie White Elk, however, his understanding of masculinity is influenced by a tribal understanding rather than Western gender constructs. Charlie reflects, “I felt proud to be a man. I think that event sealed in me the desire to help others” (Earling 31). Charlie’s initial motives for becoming a tribal officer are connected to his proud identity as a Native man when he helps the White Elk family; however, after becoming a tribal sheriff, he becomes influenced by Western assaults on tribal gender structures and begins to internalize negative views on Salish identity. This is especially apparent as he begins to re-examine the Salish people and their problems as if they are something other than what he has known all along. Charlie states, “I wasn’t sorry I drove a big official car because even the reservation problems began to look good from behind a windshield” (Earling 32). Looking at the reservation through the windshield of his government police car, Charlie views the Salish tribe and conditions of the Flathead Reservation through a distorted colonial lens. In The Invented Reality,
Paul Watzlawick argues that what is discovered in constructed realities “is an invention whose inventor is unaware of his act of invention . . . the invention then becomes the basis of his world view and actions” (10). Furthermore, the most “universally accepted construction of reality rests on the supposition that the world cannot be chaotic- not because we have any proof for this view, but because chaos would simply be intolerable” (Watzlawick 63). Charlie’s new perception of the Flathead Reservation becomes invented through a patriarchal lens as something that can be contained and manipulated so that it is not “chaotic” but rather “tolerable” through a reproduction of dominant codes.

Unlike Baptiste, Charlie advocates that the Salish integrate into mainstream society and discontinue their traditions in order to gain respect from the dominant Anglo American society; however, performing this colonized position only leaves him to be disrespected by both Natives and non-Natives. For example, the Salish never rely on Charlie, but rather depend on Baptiste when they need help. When a man rolls his car on the reservation, for instance, Baptiste rescues him with his horse because Charlie is unable to “perform” his duties. When a family passes the scene, Charlie states, “I was not the hero here. I wasn’t even important enough to be the enemy. The family ignored me. I wasn’t an Indian to them. I was a traitor in a blue uniform” (Earling 54). The Salish view Charlie as a traitor and do not consider him to be “Indian,” because of his assimilation, as symbolized by the stock issued uniform he wears that erases his identity and renders him an occupation not a person. Furthermore, in the presence of his non-Native coworkers, Charlie tries to separate himself from the rest of the Salish people and is only acknowledged by the dominant society when he wears his uniform. Charlie states, “I wasn’t sorry the whites treated me better when I put on the badge and that sometimes I thought I was better too” (Earling 32). When Charlie emulates the white officers, however, he is still reminded
of his Salish identity and is discriminated against because of it. Charlie admits, “The worst part is deep down I knew even then I wasn’t any better than any other Indian with a job” (Earling 32). Charlie’s sense of masculinity is tied to his profession enforcing American laws on the Flathead Reservation; however, he performs an Anglo masculinity that is not his reality. As a Salish man living in a world that embraces racist views on Native American people, Charlie struggles to define what being a man should be.

Rather than resisting Western ideologies like Baptiste, Charlie internalizes negative stereotypes of Native Americans. Reflecting on his experiences with the Ursuline nuns, Charlie states:

Stupid, stupid, the whole while I attended the Ursulines’ the nuns told me how stupid Indians were, again and again, so many times that I began to believe we were stupid. The idea sank to my heart and I would go home and sulk at the hard life I couldn’t escape, knowing my grandparents must be stupid too, because they were so proud to speak a language that couldn’t be written. (Earling 33-34).

Charlie consents to the dominant society by internalizing racist views of Native Americans as “stupid” and abandoning all that his Salish elders have taught him. In “The Familiar Face of Genocide: Internalized Oppression among American Indians,” Lisa M. Poupart (Ojibwe) states, “As American Indians participate in, create, and reproduce Western cultural forms, we internalize Western meanings of difference and abject Otherness, viewing ourselves within and through the constructs that defined us as racially and culturally subhuman, deficient, and vile” (87). As Charlie assumes the dominant subject position as Other and internalizes hatred towards American Indians, he feels self-doubt and disgust. He also applies the dominant culture’s codes of otherness to those within his own marginalized group, including his family. Moreover, Charlie is taught that the only way to survive is to assimilate, stating, “If the old ways are best, the best is losing, and I want to win” (Earling 34). Charlie emulates the dominant society and views his job
as a tribal police officer as the only way to “win” against racial oppression. As a result, he takes part in the damaging hegemonic practices that attempt to colonize the Salish.

Charlie’s internalization of Western ideologies also influences the way he perceives his childhood memories as “supernatural” as he takes part in silencing Native American voices. For example, Charlie recalls seeing his “grandmother rise up above the flames of a campfire as she danced to become well,” as well as “the medicine man turn his back to a crowd of people and turn once again to show his eyes colorless as silver dimes” (Earling 182). However, when Charlie reflects on seeing these spiritual forces, he denies that they ever existed and advocates that the Salish abandon their stories. Charlie states, “When I became a police officer these stories took a backseat to small houses filled with hungry children . . . I wanted to shake these people who held to these stories when their children were waking up with the smoke of cold hissing through their wood-split homes” (Earling 182). As Charlie questions the reality of his childhood memories as well as his tribal stories, he internalizes the colonial lens that ghosts Native peoples and their past. In “Indian Ghosts and American Subjects,” Renée Bergland argues, Native Americans as well as their history vanish in the minds of their colonizers through traditional American Gothic ghosting tropes that remove Natives from the American imagination (“Indian Ghosts” 5). Charlie wants to “shake” the Salish who hold onto their stories because he views the Native perspective as unrealistic. Furthermore, he questions the reality of his own childhood memories because he internalizes Western patriarchal ideals and unconsciously takes part in ghosting Salish voices.

Earling manipulates traditional American Gothic tropes that silence Native voices by ghosting families that are not part of the Salish community. When Charlie reflects on finding a car in the Flathead River with a frozen family inside he states, “They froze there like a picture of
themselves out for a Sunday drive” (Earling 88). The family’s cause of death as well as their history becomes ghosted as they literally freeze like a picture, with no surviving voices left to tell their stories. Charlie identifies the family as the Albin family from Hot Springs, but the victims’ first names are never revealed and surviving relatives are not mentioned. (Earling 88). In addition, the people in the car are never clearly identified as Native or non-Native; and their race is silenced. When examining the frozen family, Charlie’s boss, Railer, tells him, “Don’t go telling your Indian friends” (Earling 89). By discouraging Charlie from telling his “Indian friends,” about the conditions of which they found the Albin family, Railer silences their death by keeping it a secret. Furthermore, by assuming that Charlie’s “Indian friends” were not already aware of the frozen family’s disappearance, Railer implies that the Albin family is not part of the Salish community. In addition, Charlie notes that the frozen woman had blond hair but never acknowledges her race (Earling 89). Through his limited description and unfamiliarity with the Albin family, Charlie gives subtle hints that they were part of the dominant non-Native society. Earling uses imagery consistent with traditional American Gothic and ghosting tropes but applies them in a new way to ghost the voices of a non-Native family.

Earling also manipulates traditional American Gothic ghosting tropes in Perma Red as Charlie actively takes part in constructing the history of the Albin family. In traditional American Gothic texts, non-Native writers construct history by silencing the American Indian perspective and representing Natives as extinct and vanished (Bergland 40-41). In Perma Red, however, Charlie speaks on behalf of the Albin family, who is hinted at being white, and creates his own story by assuming they were happy at the time of death. Charlie is adamant that the frozen woman was smiling and states, “She was turned almost toward us, turning toward her baby, and she was smiling. She had dimples. She was smiling, I could tell” (Earling 89). With no
official evidence on the cause of the Albin family’s car accident and the assumption that the woman was smiling, Charlie accepts his own story as fact. In The Truth About Stories, Thomas King (Cherokee) states, “you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (King 10). Earling warns readers about the power of stories when Charlie takes part in recording the Albin family’s history and questions the reality of his perceptions. Charlie states, “Railer and I both had listed that accident as a river drowning. We had no other way to explain it, and I wonder now and then if that story happened the way I remember it” (Earling 90). Charlie questions his memories like the unnamed narrator in Winter in the Blood, who also reflects back on experiences and states, “The memory was more real than the experience” (Welch 18). Earling uses Charlie’s character to demonstrate the power of stories and how they shape our perceptions of people and their past. Furthermore, she manipulates traditional American Gothic tropes as Charlie speaks on behalf of the Albin family, while their actual cause of death remains ghosted.

Throughout Perma Red, Salish characters also fear that their voices will be ghosted by the non-Native society. For example, Charlie connects the non-Native frozen woman in the car to Louise and states, “And there was something about that smile that even then reminded me of Louise” (Earling 89). Charlie’s connection of the frozen woman to Louise relates to Louise’s own fear of being permanently silenced by Western patriarchy. For example, when Louise gets into a car accident with a man named Vivian, she sees a picture of it in the newspaper the next day and finds herself “looking closely at the picture . . . looking for herself in the wreck, some clue that she had been there. For a moment she wondered if her life would be recorded at all, if anyone would remember her times of suffering” (Earling 93). Although Louise’s involvement in the car accident is literally ghosted in the newspaper, the reader of Perma Red is already aware
of her involvement because she survives and is alive to tell her story. In contrast, the reader never finds out if the Albin family endured any kind of suffering because Charlie assumes they were happy at the time of death. By connecting Charlie’s recorded report of the frozen family to the newspaper that literally ghosts Louise, Earling challenges the authority of the imperial gaze and the false assumptions that are made about Native peoples that pervade recorded histories. Charlie’s assumptions about the Albin family are recorded as historical facts while Louise’s involvement in the car accident with Vivian is never recorded and is therefore permanently silenced in history. In both cases, non-Native and Native peoples are ghosted in historical documents and truths are never revealed, which inverts traditional Gothic tropes that silence only minority races. Furthermore, “facts” and observations that are recorded by members of the dominant society are portrayed as unreliable, while oral stories maintain credibility.

Earling also ghosts non-Native paternal bloodlines throughout *Perma Red* and reverses traditional American Gothic tropes that ghost Natives and women. For example, Louise’s father’s name and race is never revealed and the only background that is provided is that he is remarried to a woman named Loretta: “Her father had married Loretta Old Horn after her mother’s death, and he rarely stopped by anymore” (Earling 172). Louise’s father’s name is ghosted but his girlfriend’s name, Loretta Old Horn, survives. It is also implied that Loretta is Native: “[Louise] had laughed with Florence when they’d happen to chance on Loretta in the store or at Indian doings” (Earling 172). Loretta’s involvement in “Indian doings” insinuates that she is Native. Furthermore, Louise is constantly referred to as a mixed-raced character, which also implies that her father is non-Native. Charlie reflects, “[Louise] was a truant, one of the half-breeds we had to round up every year for school” (Earling 22). Although Louise is referred to as a mixed-raced character, her Native maternal bloodline survives. For example, Annie White
Elk’s name and Salish identity survive even after she passes away. Earling ghosts non-Native paternal bloodlines and provides survival for Native maternal bloodlines, thus reversing traditional American Gothic tropes that silence Native women.

Female characters who are not identified as Native also have ambiguous racial backgrounds and are ghosted throughout *Perma Red*. When Louise is forced to live with the Hebert family, Arliss is described as being white in her appearances but her race is never revealed. For example, “Louise noticed that Arliss’s high forehead seemed to bleach whiter in the sun . . . she kept her thin skin so powdered and creamed it resembled tissue paper” (Earling 62). Arliss is described with lighter skin complexions, but she is never identified by her race. Furthermore, Arliss places herself in a higher social status than Louise at the all-white school, Thompson Falls, and is racist towards Native Americans as she yells, “dirty, dirty Indian . . . you don’t belong here. You don’t deserve to live in my house” (Earling 63). Arliss’s background becomes more ambiguous as Louise recalls that she used to live on the Flathead Reservation: “Was this the same Arliss, the Arliss that used to live in Hot Springs? She had known Arliss . . .” (Earling 60). Although Louise recalls that Arliss used to live on the Flathead Reservation, her racial identity and background is never revealed. Furthermore, towards the end of the novel, Louise actively ghosts Arliss’ name: “She remembered Mrs. Finger but could not recall her daughter’s name. That was good, she found herself thinking, she didn’t want to know” (Earling 295). Louise strategically ghosts Arliss’ identity as an act of resistance towards oppressive non-Native women.

Earling also addresses the concern expressed by many Indigenous feminists that Natives are marked by their sexual perversity by hyper-sexualizing non-Native female characters who hold dominant places in society instead of Native women. Louise is sent to live with Mrs. Finger
and Arliss by the BIA agent, Mr. Bradlock, so that she can learn to become a “lady;” however, becoming a lady is associated with being white. Mr. Bradlock states, “She’s a beautiful girl . . . I just can’t have her living like a damn Indian” (Earling 60). On Louise’s first day at Thompson Falls, Arliss is announced as officially becoming a “lady” and is presented as the female role model for Louise (Earling 63). Although Arliss is portrayed as an ideal “lady” in a patriarchal society, she is hyper-sexualized as she has multiple sexual encounters with her mother’s boyfriend, Warner Phillips. Louise observes, “Mrs. Finger was too invested in her own ideas to see what was going on between her daughter and her dream man, too caught up in her own desire to believe her Warner Phillips was creeping his hands up her daughter’s legs, lipping his thumb into the elastic of her panties” (Earling 67). Warner Phillips views Arliss as a sexual object as she submits to his desires whenever he approaches her. Furthermore, Arliss keeps her sexual encounters with Warner Phillips a secret and remains silent about their relationship even though she is aware that he also has sex with her mother. Although Louise is forced to live with Arliss in order to learn how to become a “lady,” she admits to feeling “dirty” after learning about Arliss’ promiscuity (Earling 68). Earling reverses the Indigenous feminist observation that “Native peoples, in the eyes of colonizers are marked by their sexual perversity” by hyper-sexualizing female characters who choose to not identify as Native (Smith 10).

Unlike Arliss, who becomes a sexual object to dominant non-Native men, Louise uses her sexuality as a way to survive Western patriarchy and control non-Native men. Although Stoner is one of the most powerful symbols of Western patriarchy on the Flathead Reservation, Louise constantly outsmarts him by sexually distracting him. When Louise first approaches Stoner, she is aware of his attraction to her and does not allow herself to fall into his powerful trap: “He was watching her, stiff-eyes forward, the see-all watch that suggested indifference but
Louise knew better. She lifted a can of peas from the high shelf and flexed the calves of her legs” (Earling 137). Louise outwits Stoner and uses her sexuality as a way to get what she wants from him, thus making him an object of her control. Louise also uses her sexuality as a way for her and her grandmother to survive poverty and starvation: “She had hoped he would take her out for a meal so she could save her food for her grandmother” (Earling 221). Although Louise initially uses her sexuality as a way to survive poverty and starvation, she also discovers that her sexual power “ran two ways,” and that she can gain control by denying Stoner sexual attention: “the less he mattered to her the more he wanted her. And the more he wanted her, the less he mattered until he had become small to her” (Earling 226). Louise uses her sexuality as a way to survive as she becomes aware that Stoner becomes weak by his own desires. Furthermore, Louise learns to manipulate Stoner with her sexuality so that he needs her. Although Louise is hyper-sexualized by her colonizers, she is very strategic in the way she uses her sexuality as a tool for survival rather than genocide.

Louise’s greatest act of resistance is her refusal to die and thus her refusal to become ghosted by her colonizers. Louise is aware of Stoner’s intentions and realizes that he wants to claim Native women and silence them. Louise observes, “[Stoner] wanted to ice her then thaw her, nothing better than a doll mute to his desires” (Earling 229). Being “mute to his desires” reiterates the fear Native women have of being permanently silenced by dominant non-Native men. Furthermore, becoming a “doll” reiterates the stereotype of Native women being solely an object of sexual desire and nothing more. After discovering that Hemaucus Three Dresses is mysteriously murdered, Louise refuses to become another ghosted Native woman who can no longer tell their own story. Towards the end of the novel, Louise is physically abused by Harvey Stoner, ejected from his car, and nearly frozen, but she does not die. Instead, Louise resists the
fate of so many Salish women before her and survives. Through Louise’s survival and refusal to
die, Earling reverses traditional American Gothic tropes that portray Native women as vanished,
and thus offers empowerment to Native women who have become victims of Western patriarchy.

Earling also offers empowerment to Native men towards the end of the novel as Baptiste
becomes aware that he has taken part in his own self-destruction. After Stoner dies, Baptiste
realizes, “He drank because the white man had told him he couldn’t drink” (Earling 290). As
soon as Baptiste realizes that he is not actually resisting white dominance through his excessive
consumption of alcohol, but rather sabotaging his own life and relationships with the rest of the
Salish community, he becomes strong enough to resist it: “The drink called to him but this time
he wouldn’t answer” (Earling 290). As Baptiste decides to change his destructive habits, Earling
offers a sense of healing to the Salish community. Baptiste realizes, “And this was what he
knew, what had always been before him, a healing within his grasp” (Earling 290). The “healing
within his grasp” reiterates the message that Native men have the power to become decolonized
when they take personal responsibility for their own actions and refuse to see the world through a
distorted colonial lens. As Allan G. Johnson states in The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our
Patriarchal Legacy, an individual’s journey out of western patriarchy “begins with seeing how it
works and what it does to us, how we participate in it and how we might choose differently”
(52). By recognizing he has the power within himself to heal from the internal scars of
colonialism rather than relying on alcohol, Baptiste realizes he can truly resist becoming the
absolute fake indian.

Baptiste’s and Louise’s greatest acts of resistance towards Western patriarchy are their
refusals to vanish into the minds of their colonizers. Although Perma Red is based on the life of
Earling’s aunt Louise, the text becomes empowering to Native readers as her aunt’s fictional
counterpart, Louise White Elk, survives the car accident at the very end of the novel and resists becoming permanently silenced. Although many of the Salish characters internalize Western patriarchal ideals throughout *Perma Red*, Earling shows that becoming “decolonized” is complex and requires a continuous effort. By including a diverse range of Salish characters who react to Western patriarchy differently, Earling also shows that Western patriarchy is not an individual problem for Native women, but is a problem for the entire Native community that needs to be taken seriously. Furthermore, oppressed Native characters resist becoming the “savage Indian” when they take personal responsibility for their own self-destructive behaviors and realize they have the power to change, themselves.
CONCLUSION

Native American writers strategically use the power of language to write against the literary genocide of American Indians and deconstruct vanishing American Indian stereotypes. My thesis has sought to highlight how Native authors deconstruct stereotypes and focus on tribal survivance. Reading *Perma Red* inspired the direction this thesis took once I learned more about the negative effects of Western patriarchy in Indigenous communities, both on and off of the reservation. When I discovered that a relatively small group of women scholars, including Andrea Smith, Kathryn Shanley (Nakoda), and Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo), are currently addressing the roots of Western patriarchy that are buried deep inside tribal communities, I knew I had to contribute further to this area of research. I was surprised and dismayed to learn that “American Indian women are twice as likely to be victimized by violent crime as women or men from any other ethnic group” and that “60 percent of the perpetrators of violence against American Indian women are white” (Smith 28). Discussing constructions of masculinity and femininity is important work that is all too often met with skepticism even from Indigenous men and women who internalize patriarchal ideologies. By drawing attention to the complex politics of gender representation that stem from constructed notions of *indian*, my thesis affirms the Indigenous feminist claim that Western patriarchy is a problem for the entire tribal community, regardless of gender and age, and needs to be taken seriously.

It is my goal (and hope) that this research will contribute to the many scholarly conversations taking place about representations of race and gender in Native American literature and show that Indigenous feminist theories are important in the field of Native American literary studies because they are relevant to issues today. Native communities are still fighting for tribal sovereignty so that they can govern themselves and follow their own
institutions without patriarchal control. In addition, Indigenous feminists are actively engaging in their struggle for social justice movements, claiming that the American Indian Movement (AIM) enforced patriarchy in tribal communities. Winnebago scholar, Renya Ramirez, argues that the American Indian Movement placed Native women in subservient roles on reservations and taught Native women that Native men should be in control (Ramirez 25). Ramirez states, Indigenous feminism “should be emphasized as furthering an essential goal in Indigenous communities: to combat sexism” (Ramirez 26). Furthermore, Native women who suffer from sexual violence on the reservation are often left with no other option but to confront male-dominated tribal councils and communities, where sexual violence is often ignored (Ramirez 26).

In addition to misogyny and sexism, tribal communities are still dealing with the lasting emotional trauma of the Indian boarding school system, where children were taken from their families, given inadequate food and medical attention, often physically and sexually abused, and routinely died from starvation and disease. As Smith states, “In the case of boarding schools, it is clear that Native communities continue to suffer devastating effects as a result of these policies, including physical, sexual, and emotional violence in Native communities; increased suicide rates; increased substance abuse; loss of language and loss of religious and cultural traditions; increased depression and post-traumatic stress disorder; and increased child abuse” (Smith 43). Furthermore, case studies on violence, substance abuse, and suicides in Native families have shown a trend in originating with the generation that first attended an Indian boarding school (Smith 44). I intend for this thesis to be the start of a new conversation on the important work of Salish writer, Debra Magpie Earling, because her novel, *Perma Red*, addresses some of the roots of Western patriarchy that negatively effect Indigenous communities today and has gained very little scholarly attention since it was published in 2002 (with the exception of book reviews).
Examining Welch, Walters, and Earling in connection to each other has helped me to situate how the Gothic genre can apply to Vizenor’s theories of survivance. Although Welch, Walters, and Earling confront similar issues of Western patriarchy, the political removal of American Indians from the national narrative, and the negative effects of colonialism on American Indian identities, they use very different Gothic elements to resist and survive colonialism. Welch ghosts non-Native paternal bloodlines and inverts popular representations of Native females as invisible subjects in *Winter in the Blood*, while Walters inverts the popular representation of Indians as spectral figures by incorporating Indian ghosts that refuse to be conquered and eliminated by the dominant society in *Ghost Singer*. Furthermore, survival is dependent on Native maternal bloodlines in *Winter in the Blood*, whereas survival is dependent on Native paternal bloodlines in *Ghost Singer*. In addition, Earling inverts popular representations of the vanishing Indian and deconstructs Western assaults on tribal gender structures in *Perma Red* by ghosting non-Native bloodlines. All three authors invert traditional American Gothic ghosting tropes in ways that are different from each other; however, they each deconstruct the static representation of the *Indian* by recovering Native bloodlines and reclaiming Native identities that are empowering today.

Although *Winter in the Blood*, *Ghost Singer*, and *Perma Red* were published over a span of thirty years, each novel shows that becoming decolonized is a process that requires a continuous effort and there is still much work to be done. Contemporary Native American authors, like Welch, Walters, and Earling use literature as a way to respond to forced colonization and assimilation and overturn stereotypes. As Simon Ortiz states, “It’s entirely possible for a people to retain and maintain their lives through the use of any language. There is not a question of authenticity here; rather it is the way that Indian people have creatively
responded to forced colonization. And this response has been one of resistance; there is no
clearer word for it than resistance” (qtd. in Rader 1). Welch, Walters, and Earling all use
literature as a way to protect Indigenous tradition, resist cultural erasure, and confront colonial
tendencies of assimilation and genocide. Furthermore, all three authors confront how the ghosted
colonial past continues to haunt tribal communities today; however, they resist simply portraying
their characters as victims by writing about Native characters who refuse to be defined and
victimized by the dominant non-Native patriarchal society.
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