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Author(s): Michelle Pagni Stewart
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Judging Authors By the Color of Their Skin? Quality Native American Children's Literature

Michelle Pagni Stewart
Mt. San Jacinto College

In 1965, Nancy Larrick's "The All-White World of Children's Books" identified the extent to which children's literature and those responsible for publishing it were biased against black children. This essay made teachers and librarians more aware of the dearth of black characters and subsequently characters from other ethnic groups in children's literature, at least characters who were not stereotyped or unrealistic. Three decades later, children's literature has become more diversified, but the debate about incorporating ethnic characters continues to spark controversy. These days, the controversy seems to be centered on who has the right to create ethnic stories and characters, a debate complicated by the notions of what makes a piece of literature ethnic. Do we categorize ethnic literature solely by the color of the author's skin? Or should we instead consider the authenticity and viewpoint of the text, no matter what the author's origins? And what about subject matter? If a story written by an Ojibwa author does not deal with topics indigenous to his or her people but instead tells of a more universal conflict, would we still categorize that book as "Native American"?¹

I approach this debate over authenticity and quality through the realm of Native American texts for children's literature. The focus

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on children's literature complicates the debate since the fact that the books are created for young readers affects how we judge the literature. Typically child readers judge less well for themselves than most adults these issues of authenticity and fairness since they have not been exposed to life, history, literature and people of other cultures. In order to ensure that young readers see past stereotypes and insensitive portrayals, ethnic texts may lean toward didactic content.² Moreover many authors of books for children may underestimate young readers' ability to follow plot lines that are not chronological or that are told from multiple points of view. Even Native American authors who typically write multiple-viewpoint, non-chronological novels for adults tend to streamline the stories they write for children. As a result young readers are not exposed to Native American narrative strategies, even if they are exposed to Native American situations and characters.

As my test case I take Sharon Creech, whose 1995 Newbery medal winner *Walk Two Moons* brings aspects of Native American literary traditions to a text with a Native American protagonist. In so doing Creech has found herself embroiled in the ethnic literature debate because she herself is not Native American. I will argue that Creech's *Walk Two Moons* makes a significant contribution to children's ethnic literature in that it may paradoxically be read as a very Native American novel in theme, structure, and style. The novel merits inclusion in a classroom both because it challenges our definition of multicultural texts and because it introduces the unique narrative traditions of Native American literature.

Rudine Sims Bishop identifies three categories of "multicultural literature," determined by the content of the text rather than the ethnic background of the author. This coincides with the ideas many have regarding the authority to create ethnic characters. In a 1997 discussion on the CHILDLIT listserv, a resounding comment made by many participants was that writers of fiction should be able to create characters with different skin colors, just as they create characters who are not the same gender as they are, who have different beliefs and ideas, or who live in different places or periods. Hazel Rochman considers prohibiting someone who is not of a certain race, ethnicity, or skin color from creating a character of that race or ethnicity to be a form of "apartheid" (*Against Borders* 17). That she has chosen such a politically charged word is no ac-

cident since this matter is itself so politically charged. The discussion surrounding the recent United States census reminds us that one's ethnic background cannot always be neatly pigeon-holed.

In fact, the two sides of the debate over who can create ethnic characters are not polarized by ethnicity, with ethnic voices arguing that only insiders may depict their own culture, while outsiders argue for authorial free reign. Participants on the CHILDLIT listserv took a variety of viewpoints on whether those not of a culture should write about it.³ African American critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that being an "insider" does not guarantee that one can create authentic literature, nor is the opposite true: "No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world" (qtd. in Bishop 42). The issue is not so simple as whether writers can create characters different from themselves, for we all know they can. Instead, we need to consider how well authors create characters of other ethnicities for this helps to determine how "good" the ethnic literature will be.

There is widespread agreement that Native American literature for children has lacked authenticity and accuracy. Dane Morrison explains that problems affect current texts on Native American history: "[T]oo many texts continue to be filled with errors about American Indians because they neglect recent research. Hence, they perpetuate myths and . . . channel our thinking away from the real people into stereotypes—sometimes silly, often harmful" (8). Morrison's statement applies as well to the perpetuation of pernicious stereotypes in children's literature. Some authors continue to depict American Indian culture as foreign, as something "other" that must be brought into the fold of American culture rather than celebrated for its distinction. Some depict Native American cultures in less than humane (and thus, unrealistic) ways. Michael Dorris explained that too often, Indians continued to be treated as if they were the property of children (undoubtedly a reference to Lynne Reid Banks' *The Indian in the Cupboard*), and Native American characters are often not allowed to change, contrary to the growth of characters in most children's literature (Hirschfelder vii). Mary Gloyne Byler agrees that American Indians are not treated fairly in children's books: "There are too many books featuring painted, whooping, befeathered Indians closing in on too

many forts, maliciously attacking ‘peaceful’ settlers or simply leer-
ing menacingly from the background; too many books in which
white benevolence is the only thing that saves the day for the in-
competent, childlike Indian; too many stories setting forth what is
‘best’ for American Indians” (Hirschfelder 34-35). While things
have improved somewhat since Hirschfelder’s collection in 1982,
which includes Dorris’ and Byler’s arguments, the state of Native
American children’s literature is still bereft indeed.

Critics have attributed the stereotypes in children’s books about
Native Americans to the fact that so few have been written by na-
tives. Jon Stott highlights the dearth of Native American authors:
fewer than twenty percent of the books he studied were written by
Indian authors. What makes this particularly problematic is that
many well-intentioned outsiders who attempt to deal with Native
cultures do so ignorantly. Donnarae MacCann found in 1992 that
children’s books from an American Indian viewpoint were greatly
outnumbered by those carrying a white bias (140). Morrison cites a
study in which most American Indian scholars and leaders “argue
that Euro-American documents are so inevitably tainted by biases
and falsehoods and. . . Western concepts of history are so invari-
ably foreign to Indian culture, that almost nothing written by white
academics—no matter how attuned they may be to cultural differ-
ences—can be trusted” (19). The media perpetuate misrepresenta-
tion, according to Debbie Reese, in “‘Mom, Look! It’s George, and
He’s a TV Indian!,’” who finds “stereotypes of Native Americans
that lead [children] to believe either that Indians don’t exist any-
more, or that Indians are very exotic people who wear feathers and
live in ways vastly different from their own” (636-37). She and her
daughter coined the term “TV Indian” to represent the false images
of Indians ubiquitous in books and on television shows her daugh-
ter encounters daily. That so many children’s books about Native
Americans belong to the genre of historical fiction may compound
this: Bishop suggests an over reliance on historical fiction propa-
gates the myth of the “vanishing Indian” (49), and Reese decries
the lack of depictions of contemporary Native Americans (637-38).

Is the answer simply to require that one be Indian to write about
Indianness, or live in the period to be described? Then a Cherokee
could not with full accuracy and authenticity describe the trail of
tears, without having actually participated in the forced move. Fur-

thermore, within American Indian cultures, the Indian experience is not monolithic. Since Indian nations are distinct cultures, with diverse beliefs and practices, can someone from a Pueblo tribe write about a Chippewa character with accuracy and authenticity? R. David Edmunds questions whether one voice can speak for all American Indian experience: "Do historians who are members of the tribal communities possess particular insight into these historical issues? Are their insights into recent events more valid than those in the distant past? Can historians (non-Indian) who are not members of the tribal communities speak with an 'Indian voice?' [sic]" (cited in Morrison, 20); Morrison continues, "Who speaks for the Massachuset, for instance? Given the documentary evidence that suggests that the tribe died out during the nineteenth century, who speaks for them? In the same vein, we might ask, can Native men accurately present the experience of Native women?" (20). Is one Indian's writing about another tribe, therefore, any more authentic than the writing of an "outsider"?

Certainly a Native American may understand what it means to be Native American in ways that an outsider cannot. For example, of two picture book versions of Native American Cinderella stories, the one written by a non-native, Rafe Martin's *The Rough-Face Girl*, is more problematic than Penny Pollock's *The Turkey Girl: A Zuni Tale*, even though Pollock, from the Wyandotte tribe, is telling a tale of the Zunis. Martin's version of an Algonquin tale, as Stott notes, implicitly emphasizes European cultural values and exhibits inaccuracies (Stott 25). Martin's book also ends with "They lived together in great gladness and were never parted," echoing the "And they lived happily ever after" ending of many European tales, which is not characteristic of Native American stories.

In contrast, Pollock's version relies on Native American rather than European American structures and beliefs. It is a "pourquoi" story, a type of folktale that explains how things came to be, a trait typical of Native American oral tradition. The young girl promises her turkey friends that she will return by sundown, but when the time comes to leave, she tells herself she does not need to heed them because they are only turkeys. When she does return home, the turkeys are gone, thus ending the tale and revealing a great deal about American Indian culture. Because the girl does not stay true

to her word and because she places herself above the animals, she is punished by losing the turkeys forever, thereby emphasizing two significant values found throughout Native American cultures: first, that humans are a part of, not superior to, the animal kingdom and so must recognize the significance of animals in the world, and second, that what a person says must be adhered to, for one's word represents one's integrity. As a result, this *pourquoi* tale explains why "From that day unto this, turkeys have lived apart from their tall brothers, for the Turkey Girl kept not her word." The final line of the book reads, "Thus shortens my story," an ending more typical of American Indian oral traditions than a "happily ever after" ending.

This example seems to confirm Bishop's belief that those from within a culture are more apt to reflect the beliefs and values of the culture appropriately than someone outside it; their works are more likely to find acceptance by insiders. Yet as Bishop explains:

My claim here is not that an author from one group cannot write worthwhile books about another group, but that the resulting literature is not likely to be claimed by members of the featured group as THEIR literature. Reading the literature of insiders will help teachers learn to recognize recurring themes, topics, values, attitudes, language features, social mores—those elements that characterize the body of literature the group claims as its own. (46-47)

Bishop advocates, not that outsiders avoid writing about the culture of other ethnicities, but that those who do so take care to reflect accurately the experiences and literature of that culture. Indeed, authenticity is perhaps the most important criterion in evaluating ethnic literature. Rochman agrees: "Yes, authenticity matters, but there is no formula for how you acquire it. Anybody can write about anything—if they're good enough. There will always be inauthentic or inaccurate books, and defining authenticity on some exclusionary basis or other won't change a thing. The only way to combat inaccuracy is with accuracy—not pedigrees" (*Against Borders* 23).

With Native American children's literature, then, what we must consider when evaluating the texts is not solely who the author is. Certainly we should avoid books that continue to promote stereotypes or exhibit inaccuracies in the illustrations or story lines, and

we should consider the accuracy of the illustrations with respect to the specific tribe being depicted, including geographical accuracy. Not all Native American tribes are alike, and many problematic books lump together or confuse tribes.⁴ The resounding claims of authenticity and accuracy as key elements of good ethnic literature explain why so many are wary of further outsider attempts at creating it since so much ethnic literature for children has not met these criteria.

In short, many children's literature critics agree that books written by non-natives are not necessarily bad. In a scathing critique of Ann Rinaldi's *My Heart is on the Ground* (1999), a group of Indian critics, librarians, and authors notes that their criticism of Rinaldi's work is not related to her skin color: "Some non-Indians have written quality books about Native peoples, histories, and cultures, so it won't be argued here that only Native authors can write Native-themed stories" (Atleo 28). For instance, critics generally find white authors Scott O'Dell and Jean Craighead George, of *Island of the Blue Dolphin* and *Julie of the Wolves*, respectively, to be strong advocates for Native beliefs and culture.⁵ As I will argue shortly, Sharon Creech's novel *Walk Two Moons* also makes a significant contribution to children's literature, despite her non-native background.

Ironically, we seem to judge authors differently because of the color of their skin, resulting in a more critical reception of "outsiders" than of "insiders." Rochman explains that for a book to be good, it must break down stereotypes and create complex and flawed, rather than noble, characters: "[Good books] unsettle us, make us ask questions about what we thought was certain. They don't just reaffirm everything we already know" (*Against Borders* 19). On the CHILDLIT listserv, Deborah Churchman concluded "Writers need to be able to write about the whole of reality, not just the nice parts." Paradoxically, negative portrayals by outsiders may be accused of bias, while we may accept them from insiders. It seems, then, we may create a double standard harmful to ethnic writers that no more solves the "problem" of ethnic literature than does limiting who can write such literature.⁶

A cascade of similar debates has been released by Sharon Creech's children's novel *Walk Two Moons*. Despite winning a Newbery medal, *Walk Two Moons* has received mixed reviews. In

the *New York Times Book Review*, Rochman explained that some critics lauded Creech's storytelling ability, but others criticized her many plot contrivances. Moreover, some critics denied Creech authority to write about Indianness since she herself is not a Native American (Rochman, "Salamanca's Journey" 24).⁷ Yet Creech did not claim an American Indian identity for herself, as Indian imposters Jamake Highwater and Forrest Carter have.⁸ In her Newbery acceptance speech, Creech admitted that, growing up, she was told by some cousins she was American Indian, an idea which intrigued her: "As a child, I loved that notion, and often exaggerated it by telling people that I was a full-blooded Indian. I inhaled Indian myths, and I crept through the woods near our house, reenacting these myths, and wishing, wishing, for a pair of soft leather moccasins. (I admit. . . that my view of American Indians was a romantic one.)" (421). Her fascination with Native American mythology explains her decision to create in Salamanca an Indian character who finds solace in American Indian stories.

Walk Two Moons should not be dismissed as a "politically correct" choice but instead be recognized for its contribution to multicultural children's literature. Stott, in offering criteria to evaluate Native American texts, suggests the following queries: "Is the book accurate?"; "Is it free of stereotypes?"; "How well do[es the book] embody the cultural realities [it] depict[s]?" and "To what extent do [the author's] methods of presentation relate to the novelistic techniques of Native writers?" (148). In particular, Creech's novel responds well to Stott's last question since *Walk Two Moons* deploys many of the literary techniques found in American Indian literature, contrary to most children's novels which, Stott argues, tend to be written in a linear fashion and to focus on the development of a single character (148). In fact, Native American literary narrative, with its roots in oral tradition, differs from Western literary traditions by utilizing multiple narrators or multiple perspectives to emphasize the communal aspect of storytelling. Since the Native American view of time is cyclical rather than linear, texts may not follow a chronological order. Thus readers must be aware of shifts in perspective and time, as well as recognize the significance of the storytelling itself to the story. Creech captures the sense of multiple perspectives in interweaving the stories of Salamanca (both past and present), of Phoebe, and of Sal's grandpar-

ents as the story progresses. Creech utilizes multiple storytellers, in part by having Sal, Gram, and Gramps tell stories, and she underscores the significance of storytelling through subtle details. For instance, Mr. Birkway, Sal's English teacher, reads excerpts from the students' journals, momentarily yielding the story to another point of view, to another storyteller, which reflects the Native American belief that stories do not belong to one voice or perspective.

In addition, Creech incorporates the essence of storytelling through various stylistic devices. For instance, in using parentheses, she reminds us of an audience's reaction. "'Do you want to know an absolute secret?' Phoebe said. (I did.) 'Promise not to tell.' (I promised.)" (Creech, *Walk Two Moons* 23). We also see audience interaction—an important aspect of oral tradition which is often lost in the translation to the written word—through Gram and Gramps Hiddle. They have asked Sal to tell a story yet often interrupt her as they recall their own stories or comment on Sal's. This interaction between Sal and her grandparents depicts storytelling practices. A storyteller must account for interruptions, for reactions from the audience. In fact, as Leslie Marmon Silko recognizes, storytellers thrive on this: "[S]torytelling always includes the audience, the listeners. In fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners" ("Language" 50).

Paula Gunn Allen explains the differences between Native American and Christian beliefs and the literature that ensues from them. She says that rather than view events in a chronological, linear, and hierarchical way, Native Americans view events in relation to other events. For them, time is cyclical and space is linear, thus making events more dynamic (59). In contrast to Western literature, American Indian literature does not focus on the resolution of the conflict, nor does it revolve around a central character or hero, which would tend to hierarchize events in the literature. Instead, the focus is on the community and the way each character's life revolves around and influences the lives of others; ultimately the interaction among the people is what is important, for integration of the individual into the larger communal group is what American Indian ceremonies, which rely on oral tradition, strive for (55-60). Although a children's novel, Creech's *Walk Two*

Moons clearly demonstrates aspects of Allen's definition. In addition to multiple perspectives and the reliance on storytelling, *Walk Two Moons* also does not follow a linear chronology. In *Walk Two Moons* the shifts in time occur because of the shifts in story, but when Sal is telling Phoebe's story, the narrative time becomes that of when it happened. We become immersed in *that* story and forget that this is a retelling of events. In this way, Creech captures the timelessness inherent in Native American literature.

Other characteristics of Native American literature can be found in *Walk Two Moons*. For one thing, Native American myths are incorporated when Sal remembers her mother telling her the Black-foot creation story of Napi⁹ and when Sal tells her grandparents her mother's explanation for why the sky is so high.¹⁰ In these episodes, Creech has utilized a technique found in many Native American novels, that of incorporating narratives that have been passed down from generation to generation such as those of Leslie Marmon Silko's Yellow Woman in *Storyteller*, N. Scott Momaday's bear stories in *House Made of Dawn*, or Louise Erdrich's tales of Misshepeshu and Nanobozho in *Tracks*.

Creech has also depicted Native American cultural beliefs through dreams Salamanca has about her mother. Native Americans view dreams as messages from the spiritual world since they are the only medium through which people on earth can receive the truths of the other world (Lincoln 100-08). For some tribes, such as the Cherokees, dreams can contain an omen of something bad about to occur: as Thomas E. Mails explains, "Should someone see the apparition or appearance of a friend come and then quickly vanish, that friend would soon die" (128). In one of Sal's dreams, she sees herself floating with her mother on rafts as they look up at the sky which is moving closer and closer to them. They hear a popping sound and then find themselves in the sky. Sal's mother says, "We can't be dead. We were alive just a minute ago" (153-54). In another dream, Sal sees her mother climbing up a ladder, going up and not coming back down (169). These dreams carry special significance since they foreshadow the end of the book in which Sal is forced to come to terms with her mother's death.

Gramps Hiddle also embodies Native American perspectives, despite his not being American Indian himself. Gramps has subtle characteristics of the trickster, a complex but significant Native

American figure. A trickster can take many forms: he is known for attempting to gain something, usually food or sex, but having his attempts backfire. He is often a humorous character, meant to instruct the audience as they vicariously test social mores, only to discover that they are better off following the rules of social order. When Gramps attempts to help the woman stranded at the rest stop, he actually makes matters worse: not only has he *not* fixed her "car-bust-er-ator," but he has also removed her hoses, the "dang snakes" that he thinks might be her problem, and dismantled her engine (27-28). Although this situation does not find Gramps engaged in an activity for his own selfish motives, his actions, in which his attempts to gain something backfire, certainly are suggestive of the trickster. Another aspect of a trickster character involves transforming: changing shape so as to trick someone into giving him what he wants. Gramps displays this quality when he adopts the identity of a veteran to keep from having to pay the parking meter. Additionally, Gramps' joking with Gram about Gloria is suggestive of the trickster's lascivious ways, but in a very tame fashion befitting a children's novel.

Further characteristics of Native American literature can be seen in some of the ideology espoused by the characters, as when Sal and her grandparents are accused of trespassing on private property, and Gramps responds that rivers are not private property, reflecting the Native American view that nature and land cannot and should not be owned by man. Sal's connection to trees also reflects the view that man is connected to nature. She describes the singing tree (which her grandmother calls a good sign) and the way it did not sing the day "[her] father learned that [her] mother was not coming back" (100). Sal's journal entry tells of her mother and then of herself kissing the sugar maple, and of her own tendency to kiss trees (which the other children find unusual). When Sal draws a picture of her soul as a "circle with a large maple leaf in the center, the tips of the leaf touching the sides of the circle" (130), in contrast to the other students' depictions of their souls as a bus or a spaceship or a cow, we see the extent to which nature is a part of Sal's soul; the leaf surrounded by a circle evokes a Native American emphasis on circles in storytelling and in time (the cycles of the sun and moon, seasons, etc).

Ultimately, Creech's novel, like so many Native American novels, is about Sal's search for identity. That Salamanca compares the labels "Native American" to "American Indian" several times in the novel demonstrates the identity conflict in which she is embroiled. Louis Owens explains that finding one's identity is the key to Native American literature: "The recovering or rearticulation of an identity, a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community, becomes in the face of such obstacles a truly enormous undertaking. This attempt is at the center of American Indian fiction" (5). Even as she tells about Phoebe's reaction to her mother's leaving, Sal herself is coming to terms with her own mother's leaving. Having observed the Winterbottom family from an objective perspective, she understands why Mrs. Winterbottom might have left. In so doing, she begins to question her mother's reasons for leaving. Her grandparents try to make her aware of the similarities between her situation and Phoebe's: "They didn't say anything, but there was something in that look that suggested I had just said something important. For the first time, it occurred to me that maybe my mother's leaving had nothing whatsoever to do with me. It was separate and apart. We couldn't own our mothers" (176). Like typical Native American protagonists, then, Sal's quest involves finding her identity, which, in Native American literature, often necessitates reconciling oneself with others in one's family, community, or tribe. That her identity is wrapped up in her mother more than her tribal culture reflects how far removed she really is from her Seneca roots.

Sal's coming to terms with her mother's death through storytelling also reflects her Indianness. In telling Phoebe's story and remembering her life with her mother, she begins to retell her mother's stories, thus gaining the passion for stories her mother had that Sal obviously shared but did not recognize, again emphasizing the significance of storytelling in Native American culture. Sal hears once more the sugar maple tree singing, which symbolizes her mother's "voice" in that her mother, whose nickname is Sugar, has a maple tree engraved on her tombstone. After seeing the engraving and realizing her mother is not returning, Sal hears a birdsong: "The birdsong came from the top of the willow and I did not want to look too closely, because I wanted it to be the tree that was singing. . . . [She says] '[My mother] isn't actually gone at all.

She's singing in the trees'" (268). Through Sal's physical and emotional journeys, she is able to accept that her mother is dead and that she is not to blame. In addition, she learns to open her mind and heart to Mrs. Cadaver since she was the last person to hear the stories of Sal's mom. In retelling the stories, then, Sal takes her place as the storyteller, an important site with respect to her culture and identity.

William Bevis describes "homing in" as the method by which Indian characters are reconciled to their identity as Native Americans. Contrary to the white American novel whereby a character gains self-identity by leaving home—and would be considered a failure if he were to return to the fold—Native American novels are characterized by protagonists who need to return home and connect with their community in order to begin to understand their identity as Native Americans. In coming to terms with Phoebe's relationship to her mother and with her mother's life and stories, Salamanca is able to make sense of her own life and her mother's death. Yet many argue that *Walk Two Moons* is not Native American because Sal and her mother are not very attuned to their Seneca heritage; after all, Salamanca's name comes from what her mother *thought* was the name for her tribe. However, this idea is precisely what makes Creech's story a realistic depiction of a contemporary American Indian. A number of Indians these days are not in touch with their Indianness: part of their "homing in," in fact, results from their learning more about their culture, as both Sugar—who later asks she be called Chanhassen, her Indian name—and Sal do. That Sal relays Blackfoot and Navajo stories and Sioux history does not mean Creech is assimilating tribes; rather, it demonstrates that Sal is unsure of her Seneca traditions, just as her mother was, but that she values her American Indian heritage all the same. Furthermore, as Rochman recognizes in her review of *Walk Two Moons*, "For once in a children's book Indians are people, not reverential figures in a museum diorama. Sal's Indian heritage is a natural part of her finding herself in America" (24). If many books about Native Americans do not deal with issues and conflicts among contemporary Native Americans, Creech does so, frankly.

While I am not arguing that we should replace ethnic texts written by someone within the culture with those written by someone

outside the culture, I do suggest that the debate is not so straightforward as mere “membership” might suggest. Certainly novels such as Michael Dorris’ *Sees Behind Trees* and Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* deserve attention in the classroom, yet neither of these novels introduces students to the complexity of Native American literary traditions to the extent that Sharon Creech’s *Walk Two Moons* does.¹¹ Historical fiction by Dorris (*Morning Girl*) or by Louise Erdrich (*The Birchbark House*) may give a better sense of characters who understand and appreciate the values and traditions of their specific tribes.

But young readers also need realistic fiction about what it means to be a Native American in contemporary society. Cynthia Leitich Smith’s *Rain is Not My Indian Name* uses a contemporary setting and recognizes that the conflicts with which a young Native American struggles extend beyond her cultural identity; moreover, the novel tells the story of Cassidy Rain Berghoff through her written journal and through her “spoken” story. In utilizing this double structure in the novel, Smith echoes Native American literary traditions: the dual voices suggest a multiple viewpoint, the journal entries deconstruct the chronological structure suggested by the dates given at the beginning of each chapter, and the “spoken” sections—longer than the “written” journal entries—privilege oral over written stories. Yet children’s books about contemporary American Indians are few, and books like Creech’s *Walk Two Moons*, which can introduce young readers to the style of American Indian literature, are even more difficult to find. Because multicultural books should not be chosen merely to teach young readers the meaning of tolerance or to inform them about different ethnic cultures (Bishop 48), Creech’s *Walk Two Moons* has a place in multicultural literature, alongside the growing number of books written by Native American authors.

Walk Two Moons is a valuable novel, then, not just because it is exemplary children’s literature but also because it integrates American Indian literary tendencies. Even though it is not written by a Native American, Newbery-Award winning *Walk Two Moons* can introduce young students to characteristics of the literature and culture in ways that N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* cannot because of its complexity and subject matter; the book has, in fact, been banned in some places as unsuitable for high school

students. Moreover, Creech's novel is a coming-of-age story, appropriate for any child, of any culture. As Creech herself explained in her Newbery acceptance speech: "I don't see Salamanca as a Native American; I see her as an American, who, like me, has inherited several cultures, and who tries to sort out who she is by embracing the mystery of one strand of that heritage. Salamanca needs those stories of reincarnation; they give her hope" (422). Creech's novel gives us hope that ethnic literature can be written effectively by those outside the culture being depicted.

Notes

1. The term "Native American" is politically charged: some say it is a term used only by outsiders, not by people of Indian blood, while others prefer "Native American" over "American Indian" since the latter privileges American rather than native, suggesting what one views as the "proper" terminology varies from person to person. Moreover, the terms "Native American" and "American Indian" incorrectly suggest uniformity among peoples of various tribes. When I am discussing selected aspects of the various cultures that are similar, I will use the more generalized terms, despite the problems inherent in their use.

2. Such didacticism affects Bruchac's novel, *The Heart of a Chief*, which does a wonderful job of making young readers aware of the many cultural degradations American Indians frequently encounter, such as school mascots or Pocahontas dolls, but is heavy-handed overall.

3. See <http://www.dalton.org/libraries/fairrosa/disc/mc.2.html>.

4. For further discussion of Native American books for children, see Byler; Caldwell-Wood and Mitten; Hirschfelder; MacCann; Kruse and Horning; Rochman; Slapin, Seale, and Gonzales; Stott; and Wiget. Oyate's website includes both books to avoid and books to read: see <http://www.oyate.org>.

5. Stott considers *Island of the Blue Dolphin* a good book, but finds O'Dell does not develop the mythological ties or spirituality of his protagonists. While not necessarily stereotyping or misrepresenting Karana, O'Dell does not fully depict what would have been the mind set of the young character (150-53). Ironically, he argues, O'Dell was writing during the Native American Renaissance when "contemporary Native authors were portraying their protagonists discovering the elements of their spiritual pasts and seeking to perceive the unities informing these and then living healthy lives within them" (160). In contrast, MacCann does not find George's *The Talking Earth* to be as culturally sensitive as Stott sees it (147).

6. Rochman, in her discussion of the "apartheid" resulting from prohibiting outsiders from writing ethnic literature, criticizes the way these practices also limit ethnic writers to ethnic subjects. She cites as an example children's author Virginia Hamilton, who complained that critics would not let her write anything that was outside black experience (*Against Borders* 21-22).

7. Rochman's comments are supported if one consults *Children's Literature Review* (volume 42): *Kirkus Reviews* said "Sal's poignant story would have been stronger without quite so many remarkable coincidences or such a tidy sum of epiphanies at the end"; Cooper, in *Booklist*, said Creech's "surprises" are obvious and contrived, where Connie Tyrrell Burns' review in *School Library Journal* finds *Walk Two Moons* to be a "richly layered novel about real and metaphorical journeys" and Deborah Stevenson, in *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* also enjoyed the multiple layers and Creech's "smooth and imaginative" style (41-42). Similar arguments on both sides can be found on the CHILDLIT listserv discussion archive about *Walk Two Moons* found at <http://www.dalton.org/libraries/fairrosa/disc/walktwomoons.html>.

8. Much controversy surrounds both Highwater, author of Newbery Honor book *Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey* (1977) and Carter, author of *The Education of Little Tree* (1976). Jolivet discusses some of the controversy surrounding Highwater, explaining that while he claims a Blackfoot/Cherokee heritage, many believe this heritage was fabricated in order to sell the book, since he has not been able to substantiate his Indian background (163-69). Forrest Carter has been identified as Asa Carter, former Klansman and speech writer for George Wallace. Although Carter does seem to have some Indian blood, many critics at the least want *The Education of Little Tree* to be labeled as fiction rather than non-fiction, as it currently is. For further information, see articles by Leland and Peyser, McWhorter, Clayton, and *Time* magazine's "Little Tree, Big Lies?"

9. In the version given in Creech's novel, Napi determined whether people would live forever or die by dropping a stone into the water. Because the stone sank, he determined that people must die. Similar versions of this creation story can be found in Erdoes and Ortiz (see 469-70) and in Leeming and Page (see 102-103).

10. Sal's mother explains that when the sky was lower, people bumped their heads on it, so they pushed it up with long poles (144). A version of this tale, "Pushing up the Sky," can be found in Erdoes and Ortiz (95-97). Erdoes and Ortiz identify this tale as a Snohomish story. (Creech's novel does not identify from which tribe the story came.)

11. Dorris' *Morning Girl* does have two alternating narrators, much as Erdrich's *Tracks* does, but his book is written in a much more linear fashion than Creech's and is historical fiction.

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In African-American History, Literature & Language. African Americans and many other people of color are judged based on their skin color because racism exists in today's society. People are ignorant enough to hate past on a mistold history and are often raised in an environment that encourages that type of thinking. 2 people found this useful. The correct quote is: I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. MLKJ never said "do not" nor did he say "his". (Full Answer). Judging one by their skin color is racist. No one likes to feel someone is racist against them. Judging Authors By the Color of Their Skin? Quality Native American Children's Literature. Michelle Pagni Stewart. Mt. San Jacinto College. Three decades later, children's literature has become more diversified, but the debate about incorporating ethnic characters continues to spark controversy. These days, the controversy seems to be centered on who has the right to create ethnic stories and characters, a debate complicated by the notions of what makes a piece of literature ethnic. Do we categorize ethnic literature solely by the color of the author's skin? Or should we instead consider the authenticity and viewpoint of the text, no matter what the author's origins? Using Asian American Children's Literature. The Reading Teacher, 34(4), 382-385. Google Scholar. Bishop, Rudine S. (1982). Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English. Google Scholar. Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. (2003). Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States. Judging Authors by the Color of Their Skin? Quality Native American Children's Literature. Melus, 27(2), Summer, 179-196. Google Scholar. Stonequist, Everett V. (1937). The Racial Hybrid. In Jayne Ifekwunigwe (Ed.), Mixed Race Studies: A Reader (pp. 65-68). London: Routledge. Google Scholar. Wenberg, Michael.