



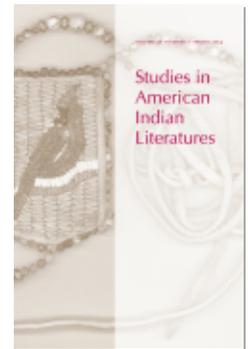
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Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship, and Law in Native American Literature by Beth H. Piatote (review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

Beth H. Piatote. *Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship, and Law in Native American Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2013.

ISBN: 978-0-300-17157-0. 248 pp.

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In this carefully researched and provocative study, Beth H. Piatote turns to a fascinating archive of literary and legal texts from the assimilation era (1879–1934) to illuminate some of the ways in which Native writers responded to the violence of legal policies on the Indian homeland (what she calls “the tribal-national domestic”) by centering their work on the resilience of the Indian home and family (or “the intimate domestic”). In Piatote’s words, “The primary objective of this book is to make visible the resilience of the tribal-national domestic by centering the intimate domestic (the Indian home and family) as the primary site of struggle against the foreign force of U.S. domestication” (4). Clearly and persuasively supporting the claim that Indian wars were wars against Indian families (171), *Domestic Subjects*, grounded in archival research and in literary and legal theory, also builds on recent scholarship on domesticity, gender, nation, empire, and settler colonialism—engaging, for instance, the work of Anne McClintock, Laura Wexler, Hazel Carby, Lora Romero, Ann Stoler, and Mark Rifkin—to showcase not only the political dimension of domesticity but also to illustrate how the political shapes the aesthetic in the literary work of five carefully chosen writers: E. Pauline Johnson (Mohawk), John Milton Oskison (Cherokee), S. Alice Callahan (Creek), Mourning Dove (Okanogan), and D’Arcy McNickle (Cree/Salish).

Placing these writers’ works in the broader literary spectrum of a

prolific generation at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (writers and public figures like Sarah Winnemucca, Gertrude Bonnin, Laura Cornelius Kellogg, Charles Eastman, Carlos Montezuma), Piatote is also interested in their political work. Reading literary works alongside legal texts, Piatote proposes two intriguing lines of inquiry: on the one hand, she shows how literature can illuminate the unseen social relations that the law obscures; on the other, she argues that literature “challenges law by imagining other plots and other resolutions that at times are figured as nonresolution or states of suspension” (9). In four chapters, a detailed introduction, and a conclusion, Piatote shows meticulously the various political dimensions of the literary works she studies, making both the aesthetics and politics of this essential (and understudied) period in Native American literature equally prominent and constitutive categories of analysis in Native American literature.

Chapter 1, “Entangled Love: Marriage, Consent, and National Belonging in Works by E. Pauline Johnson and John M. Oskison,” offers a legal and literary history of marriage law in the United States and Canada by examining the stakes of two forms of marriage for Indigenous communities, interracial marriage and polygamous marriage, in E. Pauline Johnson’s “A Red Girl’s Reasoning” (1893) and John Milton Oskison’s “The Problem of Old Harjo” (1907). Piatote is interested in the tropes of “Indian suicide” and “religious conversion” as forms of voluntary surrender in both legal and literary texts. She starts by showing that both in the United States and Canada Indigenous people are subject to two forms of what she calls “the national domestic”: the tribal-national domestic and the settler-national domestic. Examining the implications of Canada’s Indian Act of 1876—which stipulated that Indigenous women who “married out” of their tribal nation lost not only their property but also their identity as Native women—and the anti-polygamy campaigns in the United States, Piatote shows how settler societies (like the United States and Canada) were anxious about the threat posed by contemporary Indigenous communities’ capacity to reproduce not only lives but also culture and land claims (25). She shows persuasively how writers like Johnson and Oskison engage the laws by offering alternative endings in their works and thus suggesting the potential for resistance in Native communities. Tracing the long history of death of Native women in American sentimental fiction, Piatote

shows how Johnson uses this genre and to what ends: “unlike the suicidal Indian women of historical romance or the plucky yet ultimately domesticated heroines of sentimental fiction, Johnson’s female protagonists often unsettled nationalist narratives of containment” (25); at the end of the story Christine Robinson, daughter of an Indian mother and a Hudson Bay trader, withdraws willfully from a marriage with Charlie McDonald, a white man. Similarly, Oskison’s story is about a polygamist marriage of Creek elders in Oklahoma, whose marriage is in jeopardy when Harjo wants to join the church yet refuses to end his plural marriage. Piatote shows that Johnson’s and Oskison’s stories represent “the struggle of Indian protagonists who sought to separate the terms of consent, agreeing to one aspect (love) but not the other (death)” at the same time that they “animate the possibility of resistance by disentangling the terms of consent” (47).

In chapter 2, “Unnatural Children: Adoption and Loss in S. Alice Callahan’s *Wynema* and E. Pauline Johnson’s ‘Catharine of the ‘Crow’s Nest,’” Piatote turns to sentimental fiction again to show how and why Callahan and Johnson portrayed Native women as mothers of adopted children. Here she is concerned with the meaning of “unnatural children” in two senses: the adoption of nonbiological children, on the one hand, and “the legal invention of Indians as wards of the nation and perpetual minors under law” (12), on the other. Interested in adoption both for its promise and its limitations, Piatote shows how, as legal wards, or “unnatural children” of the state, Indian people have very little status to make claims as parents. She turns to Callahan’s *Wynema* (a sentimental novel recovered by A. LaVonne Ruoff in 1997) and to Johnson’s story to show two distinct ways in which motherhood and adoption become useful tropes to counter the relegation of Indian people to wardship and the public suspicion that Native people could be fit for domesticity. One of the contributions of this chapter is Piatote’s interpretation of domesticity as a potential place for recovering Native agency. She reads adoption in Johnson’s “Catharine of the ‘Crow’s Nest’” (1910) as “an act of familial and national autonomy” (74); when a white child’s mother drowns in a canoe, an Indian mother rescues the white child, the story thus reversing the trope of the suicidal Indian woman. Piatote shows how, for Callahan, adoption came at a cost: the erasure of sexual agency and the “suppression of the threat of Indian women as reproducers of life and culture” (53). For Johnson’s heroine, adoption erases the moth-

er's sexuality; this erasure, Piatote notes, must be understood in the context of (national) surveillance and disciplining aboriginal women's agency (82).

Chapter 3, "Preoccupations: Labor, Land, and Performance in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*," zooms in on the concept of "occupation" as place, labor, and military action. Specifically building on two distinct threads on scholarship on Morning Dove's work—on mixed-blood identity and the novel's complicated authorship—Piatote offers a reading of the novel centered on its claims to land: "*Cogewea* links indigenous histories and economies with the practices of place making, again affirming 'lived topographies' or Indian occupations in multiple senses" (108). Piatote shows how both historical and legal records support the view that Indian women's lives and land allotments (like *Cogewea*'s) were in danger if women made the wrong choices in love. A particularly provocative section of this chapter is the connection between Indian occupation and citizenship through performance. More specifically, taking the readers on a tour of federal Indian policy, from the Marshall trilogy to the Dawes Act of 1887 and the work of the Competency Commissions in determining Indian claims to and qualifications for US citizenship, Piatote focuses her attention on the performance of citizenship in *Cogewea*, which included the purposeful performance of incompetence and other subversive uses of patriotism: "performing Indianness by pandering to audience expectations created space for indigenous subjects to express their difference and resistance to American imperialism" (115). The chapter also meditates on the concepts of authorship and authority in the novel, pointing to both Morning Dove and editor Lucullus McWhorter's commitment in the novel yet noting the collaborators' "separate and shared" investments in it. Last but not least, Piatote argues that *Cogewea* "introduces an important aesthetic in Native American literature: the dialectic of preoccupation, which links pre-occupation of land to current colonial occupations to dreams of future reoccupation or alternative routes of survival" (130–31).

In chapter 4, "The Long Arm of Lone Wolf: Disciplinary Paternalism and the Problem of Agency in D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*," Piatote turns to a landmark ruling, *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* (1903), to examine entrapment and the possibilities for escape that McNickle's novel envisions. Two Supreme Court rulings, *US v. Kagama* (1886) and *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* (1903), positioned Indian communities "as ines-

capably subjected to federal authority” (135). Specifically, in *Lone Wolf* the Supreme Court made the plenary power of Congress over tribes unrestricted, erasing tribal consent (required by treaties) and reaffirming Indian dependence. Piatote argues, “The closed circuit of legal discourse represented in *Lone Wolf* that forecloses Indian opposition is precisely a form of surrounding and thereby provides a critical context for examining motif of entrapment and escape in *The Surrounded*” (137). She places the novel in the context of competing narratives of Salish history and the ruling in *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, focusing her attention on the subplots of Catherine and Elise. Acknowledging that most scholarship on this novel so far has focused mainly on Archilde, the male protagonist, Piatote turns her attention to alternatives for escaping (such as Catherine’s renunciation of Catholicism) and models of resistance (provided by Elise and Catherine). Especially provocative and insightful is the reading of Catherine’s renunciation of Catholicism through what Piatote calls “the Kateri narrative,” reading Catherine’s moves between temporal spiritual worlds alongside the story of Catherine Tekakwitha, the seventeenth-century Mohawk woman who converted to Christianity and was recently sanctified by the pope. Similarly, extending her discussion of gender and Indigenous forms of power, Piatote reads Elise La Rose’s sexual, physical, and verbal power in opposition to the contained, desexualized female characters in the works of Johnson and Callahan she explores in previous chapters.

The strong analysis of Native literature, history, gender, and law in *Domestic Subjects* is punctuated by photographic intermezzos—beautiful and suggestive photographs from the Idaho State Historical Society, Washington State University Special Collections, Gonzaga University Special Collections, and personal collections—opening each new chapter and providing a snapshot into the lives and endurance of the people at the heart of Beth Piatote’s study. The title of the book also captures the two interrelated conditions of Indian communities during the assimilation era: their legal status as “domestic subjects” of the US settler state and their participation in the national domesticity project as convenient subjects of representation. Among many others an important contribution of this book is Piatote’s positioning of the category “domestic subjects” in opposition to that of “US citizenship” to showcase how Native Americans, as “domestic subjects” by law, were considered legal wards of the US state, even after the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.

Piatote argues forcefully for understanding the implications of federal Indian policy on both Native families and Native representation. She rightly notes that Native American citizenship deserves more attention in American studies scholarship. The concluding chapter extends the analysis to contemporary Native communities and the ways in which contemporary Native literature continues to seek alternative visions that defy the colonial imaginary.

A. Robert Lee, ed. *The Salt Companion to Jim Barnes*. London: Salt, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-84471-718-7. 186 pp.

Ingrid Wendt, *Eugene, Oregon*

One of the hazards of sustaining a long, productive writing career is that readers seeking insights into that lifetime of work may be able to find reviews and studies of individual books but little *overview*. For prolific and well-established poet, essayist, critic, translator, and fiction writer Jim Barnes (1933–), A. Robert Lee's collection of eight critical essays, by a wide range of scholars, plus Lee's own comprehensive introduction, essay, and lively interview with Barnes, begins to fill that need and makes a well-informed, long-overdue, and valuable beginning toward a rightful placing of Barnes within the canon of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American literature.

To fully appreciate the need for Lee's collection, a short Barnes biography is in order. Born in Oklahoma, where he served as state poet laureate from 2009 to 2011, Barnes can rightly be called a citizen of the world. Recipient of numerous awards—among them a Rockefeller Bellagio residency, a residency at the Villa Waldberta, from Munich's *Kulturreferat*, two residencies (each) from Stuttgart's Schloss Solitude and France's Camargo Foundation, the Columbia University Translation Center Prize, the Oklahoma Book Award, the American Book Award, and an NEA fellowship—Barnes has spent substantial periods of time working, teaching at universities in the United States and abroad, and writing in France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland, as well as in Missouri, Utah, Oregon, New Mexico, and elsewhere in the American West.

Drawing from his complex Anglo-Welsh-Choctaw lineage, plus his deep knowledge of ancient Greek literature, Dante, Calderón, British late-Augustan and Romantic poets, as well as French, Italian, Spanish,