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## Review of *Muting White Noise: Native American and European American Novel Traditions* By James H. Cox

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*Muting White Noise: Native American and European American Novel Traditions.* By James H. Cox. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. xi + 338 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

If, as James Cox argues, “the origin of colonialism is imaginative,” and narrative “the force that sets colonialism in motion,” then which stories have anchored Eurowestern colonialism? Conversely, what are the enduring stories of survivance and sovereignty that have sustained Native peoples through five hundred and more years of what Gerald Vizenor has termed “the word wars”? Taking as his premise that words create worlds, that stories carry within them “real world implications,” Cox focuses his attention on half of his subtitle:

Native American Novel Traditions. More specifically, he considers a prominent strand of this tradition: the artful revising and reimagining of colonizing texts of all kinds.

Beginning with his careful introduction, Cox singles out the “consistent flaw” characterizing much non-Native scholarship on Native American literatures: “lack of familiarity with tribal and Native intellectual contexts.” By foregrounding this ongoing ignorance and dismissal of Native intellectuals, Cox makes clear his own critical stance. Rather than reproduce yet another text of “academic colonialism,” he instead aligns himself with one of the most powerful movements in contemporary Native Studies: indigenous literary nationalism. He relies almost exclusively on Native critical sources while steering clear of “culturally specific beliefs and practices with which [he has] little, no, or only textual experience.” By spelling out his “politics of location” within contemporary Native literary scholarship, Cox unifies his approach and subject: how narratives of absence disseminated throughout American popular and literary traditions can be exposed, overthrown, and re-presented.

An introductory chapter frames this analysis by tracing the ways foundational Native novelists—John Rollin Ridge, S. Alice Callahan, Mourning Dove, D’Arcy McNickle—model critical reading as an anticolonial practice through their commentary on varying forms of Euro-American textual production. Three ensuing chapters offer sharp readings of Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*, Gerald Vizenor’s novels, and Sherman Alexie’s fiction, exploring how each writer engages with non-Native storytelling traditions about Native America. Taken together, these chapters highlight not only nimble “acts of revision and subversion,” but also the liberating potential unleashed by imagination.

At the same time, Cox tries to anticipate criticism that his consciously delimited focus on “European American privileged and popular narratives” contradicts his introduction’s allegiance to indigenous literary nationalism, shown, for example, by his inclusion of Craig

Womack's argument that "Native literatures deserve to be judged by their own criteria, in their own terms, not merely in agreement with, or reaction against, European literature and theory." Cox answers potential critics by way of an all-too-brief part 2—a forty-six-page chapter in which he "uses the works of Native authors as a critical lens through which to read the traditional and revised European American literary canon." His rapid "red reading" of a slew of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works reminds us that from Child to Cooper, from London to Cather, American writers have long plotted Native absence. Their collective inability to imagine "other destinies" for Native Americans besides extinction—as exemplified by *Moby-Dick*, one of Native writers' favorite intertextual targets—makes them culpable in the long story of conquest.

At its best, *Muting White Noise* harnesses close readings in the service of highlighting the lineage, status, and stakes of competing "novel traditions." However, I wish the book's format had more fully embodied the challenges posed in its subtitle. More specifically, the study would benefit from a longer concluding section that pushes the implication of "red readings" for the relationship between Native and American literary studies. Just as Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations* showed how nineteenth-century Euro-American literature cannot be understood apart from African American intellectual and cultural traditions, *Muting White Noise* gestures toward more critical cross-readings between the fields of American and Native American literatures. Finally, if literary scholarship as practiced here chooses not to cite non-Native critical sources, then should *this* book go uncited in future studies of Native literature? Cox's important book suggests the many stories yet to be told about how "we" work in the fields of Native and Euro-American literatures.

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