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Margery Fee. *Literary Land Claims: The “Indian Land Question” from Pontiac’s War to Attawapiskat*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2015. Pp. v, 316. CAD \$38.99.

At the open of *Literary Land Claim: The “Indian Land Question” from Pontiac’s War to Attawapiskat*, Margery Fee asks “[H]ow does literature claim land?” (1) and postulates that a national literary narrative constitutes Canadian nationalism. Land is claimed, she writes, through historical narratives that function as evidence for the existence of a nation and formulations of national character; moreover, such land is settled through labour—including the labour of

storytelling. In framing her argument, Fee draws on thinkers ranging from Northrop Frye and John Locke to Margaret Atwood and Thomas King. She reads the mythos of *terra nullius*<sup>1</sup> as making space for “heroic explorers . . . [to] claim land imaginatively rather than literally” (6), in part through the vanishing Indian stereotype.<sup>2</sup> “The heroic author,” she argues, “takes over from the vanishing Indians to form a new [I]ndigenous mythology for the newcomers, who thus become [I]ndigenous themselves” (6). Fee reads *terra nullius* as a catalyst that allowed the canon of Canadian literature to form and then problematizes this formation by reading John Richardson (1796–1852), Louis Riel (1844–85), E. Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake (1861–1913), Archibald Belaney/Grey Owl (1888–1938), and Harry Robinson (1900–90) as (re)claiming land and literature through Indigenous rhetoric and decolonial storytelling.

As such, Fee encourages scholars, academics, writers, and those interested in decolonization and Indigeneity to further consider *terra nullius* and its various ramifications on bodies of Indigenous peoples and bodies of literature (which it may be apt to term *filius nullius* and *fabula nullius*, respectively). Fee’s insightful readings of Grey Owl, Riel, and Johnson—writers whose claims to Indigeneity are complicated and at times problematic—as propagators of this decolonial and reclamational work encourage us to reflect on how we may decolonize the representation of Indigeneity and think of Indigenous identities and literatures as heterogeneous, complicated, inclusive, and intersectional.

Fee discusses Richardson’s *Wacousta* and its sequel, *The Canadian Brothers*, in order to explore Richardson’s use of gothic conventions. She suggests that we (re)read him not simply as a founder of Canadian literature and purveyor of savage Indigeneity but as someone who simultaneously “hoped that his writing would move Canadians to resume earlier practices of treating Indigenous people as equals under the British Crown” (44). Furthermore, Fee notes that Richardson’s novels “not only *describe* the power of a curse, they also can be seen as *laying* one on those who settled Canada” (87; emphasis in original). She understands Richardson’s texts as perpetuating savage stereotypes and asks us to register how Canadian cultural nationalism depends on North American settler colonialism and its relationship with Indigeneity.

Fee explores Riel’s complicated identity and reads him as a visionary Métis political leader, a thinker of Indigenous sovereignty, and a man whose loyalty to the Crown sometimes aided settler colonialism. She critically analyses his two addresses during his trial for high treason in 1885 and argues that “Riel marks the limits of Canadian sovereignty itself, which explains why he lives on in Canadian discourse” (91). Her literary analysis of his speeches

and documents reveal a contradictory Riel, who cannot be easily assimilated to Canadian nationalism. Riel's inconsistencies "ha[ve] been connected to the difficulties Canadians have found in producing a coherent national narrative," says Fee, reading Riel's oration through Taiiaki Alfred's notions of Indigenous theorization and Neal McLeod's notes on "Cree narrative memory" (115). Through Fee's readings we are asked to remember that incoherence within nationalism can stem from the inability to "agree on its primary defining events" (116). These sections offer valuable insight into our conceptualizations of genealogy and canonization and offer us *alternative* ways of thinking about story. As King reminds us, everything is story, and Indigenous storytelling allows us to reconsider the curation of our national *history*. Literature, like this country's treaties, is sustained "by relationships, respect, and responsibility" (Fee 114). These sections of the text are invaluable tools that help us radically rethink our conceptualizations of geopolitics, identity, place, and sovereignty in bodies of literature and land. Fee, through Alfred and McLeod, asks readers to approach these conceptualizations holistically via Indigenous epistemologies that rely on kinship and relationality rather than a homogenous and hierarchal Canadian "I."

Subsequently, Fee surveys both Johnson/Tekahionwake and Belaney/Grey Owl's creative milieus to demonstrate the pervasiveness of settler colonial stereotypes, specifically colonial beliefs in the civilized/savage dichotomy and "the squaw." She examines how such expectations become ingrained through the politics of tribal membership and blood quantum laws. Responding to contemporary Indigenous scholars such as Glen Coulthard, Philip J. Deloria, Audra Simpson, and Kim TallBear, Fee shows both Johnson and Grey Owl to be haunted by the constant questioning of their Indigenous authenticity by settlers and FNMI (First Nations, Métis, Inuit) peoples alike. Her intersectional readings move the question of "Indian play"<sup>3</sup> beyond its obvious problems of cultural appropriation and evaluates how sex, gender, cultural knowledge, and sexuality are woven into these prominent Indigenous identities. In this reading, Johnson is queered by her departure from heteronormative marriage relations and her embracing of both her Indigeneity and her whiteness; this doubling of identity and "play" is enacted in her Mohawk name, Tekahionwake, which translates to "double life." Johnson's life draws heavily upon this doubling as she catered to both whiteness and Indigeneity by dressing in both traditional garb and settler missionary clothing and paying homage to her Mohawk father and European mother. Likewise, Grey Owl's "going beaver" grants him entry to a "queer set of relationships where his beavers became his people" (150). Thus within Fee's frameworks,

both Johnson and Grey Owl are queered and sexualized in ways that allow Indigeneity to transgress its cis-normative, heteropatriarchal expectations. In these sections of the book, scholars, activists, students, and those interested in Indigenous queer, feminist, ecological, animal, and/or literary studies will find great value and insightful critique in thinking further about the possibilities of decolonialism from an Indigenous perspective: this is a decolonialism that is multifarious and inclusive of figures that complicate settler expectations of Indigenous identities and literatures.

Fee ends *Literary Land Claims* by drawing the aforementioned texts together and highlighting the productive decolonial work they do as imaginative pieces that contribute to the Canadian *imagination*. Calling attention to “Canad[a’s] long history of believing ‘our own hype about inclusion’” she includes social media, commentary, and policy within her purview of literature (216). She concludes by ruminating on contemporary issues of land claims turned literature, from Oka/Kanehsatake<sup>4</sup> in 1990 to Attawapiskat’s<sup>5</sup> critique of federal funding, and lack thereof, which turned viral with #Attawapiskat in 2011. Fee positions her stories of fracture and dispossession as contributing to the ongoing struggles of the Attawapiskat First Nation and Indigenous livelihoods in Canada. Social media, she argues, now contributes to literary land claims in both empowering and disempowering ways, ones that reiterate the savage/civil binary (as demonstrated in critiques of Theresa Spence,<sup>6</sup> for example) as well as the resurgence of Indigenous resistance (witnessed in the #Attawapiskat campaign and viral blogging).<sup>7</sup> Finally, she calls for a decolonization of Canadian literature by incorporating Indigenous methods of storytelling that defy and deny traditional expectations of academic writing styles and jargon. “Story,” she contends, needs to be “retheorized and the land restored” (224). Fee’s argument is a compelling reframing of Indigenous literatures and Canadian cultural nationalism. Her case that literature and storytelling are powerful decolonial tools arrives at a crucial time for Indigenous literature and theory as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to decolonize the academy and public school systems, both of which are bound up within Canada’s literary canon. Thus, I wholeheartedly endorse Fee’s text as an important addition to our decolonial theoretical toolkit.

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## Notes

- 1 The Latin expression for “nobody’s land.” *Terra nullius* as an ideology became a driving force behind settler colonialism and the argument that peoples indigenous to Turtle Island did not “own” the land, thereby paving the way for encroachment and settlement. Within the context of this

book, *terra nullius*, through a lack of Indigenous literature being validated or published in written form, is enacted via the belief that nobody's land is maintained by nobody's story (*fabula nullius*).

- 2 The "vanishing Indian" is an ideology similar to *terra nullius*: a settler colonial ideology dependent on the savage/civilized binary. It claims that Indigenous peoples sacrificed themselves in order to ease the path of white settlers either through assimilation (the "noble/civil savage") or through self-inflicted genocide, both cultural and literal. For contemporary Canadian examples of this ideology in action see the Indian Act, Bill C-31, Bill C-51, residential/boarding/day schools, CFS, the Sixties Scoop, blood quantum laws, and most Westerns.
- 3 The concept of "playing Indian," as outlined by Philip J. Deloria, is the settler adaptation and appropriation of Indigenous customs, ceremonies, fashion, music, and traditions (e.g., Coachella music festival-goers wearing headdresses).
- 4 The "Oka Crisis" was a land dispute between the Kanehsà:ke Mohawks and the town of Oka, Quebec, which wanted to build a golf course over traditional burial grounds in 1990. It sparked a major national debate over Indigenous sovereignty.
- 5 In 2016, Attawapiskat First Nation declared a state of emergency after eleven youth attempted suicide in one night. The event became a major point of reference in addressing inadequate funding, housing, mental health, and living conditions on reservations.
- 6 Chief Theresa Spence appealed to the Canadian Red Cross to assist residents of the Attawapiskat First Nation in light of the inadequate, overcrowded, and unhealthy living conditions on her reservation. In 2012 she went on a hunger strike in support of #IdleNoMore and to focus attention on FNMI issues.
- 7 See Chelsea Vowel's *âpihtawikosisân*.

#### Works Cited

Deloria, Philip J. *Playing Indian*. Yale UP, 1998.

Vowel, Chelsea. "Attawapiskat: A Study in the Need to Openly Address Misunderstandings." *âpihtawikosisân*, 2 Aug. 2012, Wordpress, <http://apihtawikosisan.com/2012/08/attawapiskat-a-study-in-the-need-to-openly-address-misunderstandings/>. 14 Oct. 2017.