Feminist Readings of Native American Literature: Coming to Voice by Kathleen M. Donovan (review)

Barbara J. Cook

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as "The American Form of the Novel" (1927), "Censorship" (1930), and "Regionalism in American Fiction" (1932) reveal Austin's considerable perspicacity as a literary critic, and many essays demonstrate Austin's insight as a cultural critic on an even wider range of topics involving intersections of art and political social theory.

Ellis also provides more complete bibliographic reference to Austin's entire body of magazine publication. The result is an impressive, readable volume that should do much to strengthen—and introduce new scholars to—current critical recovery of Austin's significance in American literary history while also contributing substantially to more general literary study of the rise and significance of American magazine writing and writers in the early twentieth century.

Feminist Readings of Native American Literature: Coming to Voice.
By Kathleen M. Donovan.
Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998. 181 pages, $35.00/$19.95.

Reviewed by **Barbara J. Cook**
Utah State University

In *Feminist Readings of Native American Literature*, Kathleen M. Donovan seeks to develop a dialogue between feminists and Native Americans. Among the many parallels that exist between Native American literature and feminist literary and cultural theories, Donovan sees the issue of voice as the most fundamental issue raised by both literary fields. She asks, "Who can speak? and how? and under what circumstances? What can be said? And after the ideas find voice, what action can be taken?" (7–8). Donovan skillfully explores these issues and connections in *Feminist Readings* through a variety of lenses, including feminist literary and cultural theories, ethnography, ethnopoetics, ecofeminism, and postcolonialism.

Donovan examines a wide range of texts: the songs of the women in the masculine-dominated Havasupai society, which function as sites of resistance in that society; autobiographical novels of Canadian Métis women, which serve to help them find a voice and an identity; and the works of feminist theorist Hélène Cixous and Native American poet Joy Harjo, which Donovan believes reveals "a complex link between the self-reflexive nature of darkness and femaleness, the romance of the shadow" (143). Other chapters include an insightful look at N. Scott Momaday's depiction of women in his novels (a depiction that Donovan finds disturbing), a comparison of the influence of oral tradition in the works of Paula Gunn Allen and Toni Morrison, and a perceptive analysis of the depth of control editor Lucullus Virgil McWhorter exerted over Mourning Dove's novel, *Cogewea: The Half Blood*.

Donovan connects these diverse chapters with a concern for "language, and the ways in which language shapes culture and identity" (13). She asserts that both Native American literature and feminist theory challenge

the forms of language within a masculine discourse and that "new alignments are already being voiced across gendered and national borders, through the medium of storytelling, whether oral or written, which is, after all, the heart of resistance and continuance" (14).

Donovan begins her exploration with an analysis of the autobiographies and autobiographical novels written by Beatrice Culleton, Maria Campbell, and Lee Maracle—Canadian women of mixed blood (Métis)—and looks at how these writings help their authors achieve voice through a reconciliation of multiple identities "inherent in persons who belong to more than one culture" (10). Grounding her discussion in the historical context of the Canadian Métis situation, Donovan looks at the patterns of strong resistance to the patriarchal power of the colonizers that is reflected in the works of these Métis women and notes that Maracle and the other authors see "language as a key to identity formation and cultural transmission" (37).

In her most provocative chapter, Donovan discusses the work of N. Scott Momaday, considered one of the most representative and recognizable authors of the "Native American Renaissance." For her, Momaday's "representation of women characters raises disturbing issues" that ultimately act to disempower a female reader (11). She notes that Momaday does not "even attempt to sympathetically articulate the experiences of his contemporary women characters," but instead " he silences them" (74). Using feminist theories, Donovan draws on many examples from Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and *Ancient Child* and demonstrates that his work provides for the feminine reader "a lack of harmony and balance, an underlying misogyny," resulting in a subversion of sacred myths, stories, and songs and ultimately a devaluing of women (98).

Addressing another area of patriarchal discourse found in the "canon" of Native American literature, Donovan acknowledges that Lucullus Virgil McWhorter is generally credited with having a great deal of influence over the work of Mourning Dove (Christine Quintasket), one of the first Native American women to write a novel. As Donovan notes, it is evident that in his editorial capacity, McWhorter made significant contributions to the revisions of *Cogewea: The Half Blood.* Basing her argument on an examination of the Mourning Dove–McWhorter correspondence and a manuscript that became the basis of Jay Miller's *Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography*, Donovan asserts that "Mourning Dove was a player in the editorial decisions that produced her novel" and that "*Cogewea* is an ambitious, collaborative literary work that grew out of a complex relationship between a Native American woman and a Euro-American man" (12).

On the other hand, a different view of achieving voice is addressed in a comparison of Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* and Toni Morrison's novels such as *Sula, Beloved,* and *Jazz.* Donovan examines the way in which two women of color explore how the search for individual and cultural voice is shaped by the oral traditions of Native American

and African American culture and "by the relationship of landscape to human action" (13). Donovan concludes that for Allen's and Morrison's characters, that search for voice becomes a "reconciliation of an individual and communal consciousness . . . [, and] that reconciliation can occur only within their female relationships, in specific landscapes, through the power of storytelling" (137).

In *Feminist Readings*, Donovan has synthesized studies from the fields of Native American literature and feminist literary and cultural theory and given us valuable insight into how they intersect and support each other. This is an important first step in opening a discussion about ways in which Native American female writers offer alternatives, depth, and commonalities to gender-based theories.

Leaning into the Wind: Women Write from the Heart of the West.
Edited by Linda Hasselstrom, Gaydell Collier, and Nancy Curtis.
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. 388 pages, $25.00.

Reviewed by **Barbara "Barney" Nelson**
Sul Ross State University

Editors Linda Hasselstrom, Gaydell Collier, and Nancy Curtis bring together the prairie voices of over two hundred women to provide a patchwork of rural life in the northern high plains of Colorado, Nebraska, North and South Dakota. While detractors accuse rural people of holding only economic-based relationships with land and animals, these rural women eloquently stitch together another story, making clear the differences between romance/nostalgia and the development over time of an affectionate clear-eyed acceptance of the dark side of place.

The unique, sacred/profane-blurring, rural point of view sings in stories about a "master" irrigator with his "disciples" of children, the barefoot lure of squishing fresh cow dung between one's toes, or the thrill of "watching the pantry fill up with sparkling jars of veggies and fruits," as well as a little girl's first trapline and an old woman's first wolverine. Multiple voices weave overarching storyteller threads through this collection of excerpts from handwritten manuscripts, family photo albums, a seventy-year-old notebook, diaries, poems, short memoirs, and letters—sometimes as many as three voices per page. The brief vignettes are organized into chapters with such labels as "This Soil, My Body," "Grass Echoes Grass," and "The River of Stories."

The women embrace weather as an internalized "parental voice" or as a stern partner in intimacy: wind drying the sweat on a woman's face, blizzards roaring through the night like a freight train, rain on canvas, gumbo mud, wind, sleet, hail, flood, lightning, or the coming tornado that "turned everything yellow" while the "air held its breath" and tree leaves "turned upright on their stems." An old woman sensuously imagines herself turning