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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Rachel's Children: Stories from a Contemporary Native American Woman. By Lois Beardslee.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0j00q33n>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 29(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2005-09-01

DOI

10.17953

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struggles into perspective: “Rider and horse, yes, but one and the same” (20). The now-tame mare resembles the now-reflective narrator who looks back on difficult years and labors:

I saved her; she blessed me.
She makes a great ride now and I carry out
all her plans for escape— (20)

Like the mare, the narrator has a fiery spirit, a trait that lets her succeed in a man’s world.

Philip Heldrich

University of Washington, Tacoma

Rachel’s Children: Stories from a Contemporary Native American Woman. By Lois Beardslee. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004. 160 pages. \$69.00 cloth; \$22.95 paper.

Ojibwe author Lois Beardslee’s latest work, *Rachel’s Children: Stories from a Contemporary Native American Woman* is a short but impressive novel that, at its core, is a fantastically crafted trickster tale and a bold indictment of the ongoing effects of racism on Native American children and their families. Using the conventions of both the nineteenth-century white woman’s captivity narrative and twenty-first century self-reflexive ethnography, Beardslee voices a deeply pointed critique of cultural exploitation, race relations, and the disparate treatment of Native students in public education from a surprising viewpoint—the eyes of a reluctant white woman scholar bent on exploiting her informant’s knowledge to produce her first publication, a children’s book of trickster tales. It is this perspective that echoes the standard conventions of early accounts of white women’s “life amongst the Indians” and contemporary fieldwork “accounts of entry” into the most secret corners of Native experience. And like all good captivity narratives, the story is one of revelations—and like all good ethnographies, one of . . . well, revelations.

Of course, since *Rachel’s Children* is also a trickster narrative, the narrator’s captor and informant, Rachel, an Ojibwe storyteller and education specialist, never gives the narrator the keys to salvation or reveals any deep cultural secrets. Instead, the narrator slowly comes to understand that her own privilege is something she has to own up to, however reluctant she may be to turn the gaze toward herself. This “returning” of “the gaze” through a story written by a Native woman (Beardslee) told through the eyes of a white woman (the narrator), who is herself telling the story of a Native woman (Rachel) is enough to leave literary theorists in a giddy frenzy for decades to come. However, what this novel offers, beyond interesting questions about intertextuality, genre, multiple-voiced texts, and “talking back” to the colonizer, is simply an opportunity to make readers question their own subject positions—whether Native or non-Native, urban or rural, teacher or student—as they ponder the text’s

critiques of an outsider's (thus the reader's) desires for the authentic, the vanished, the debased, and/or the quaint Native other. Because of this effect, the novel will certainly prove useful to any introductory course of Native studies as an example of the absurdity of anthropological or other scholarly discourse that seeks to erase the power structures that inform such an activity.

From the beginning, the power dynamic between text and "other" informs most of the narrative voice as the woman interviewing Rachel ponders her simultaneous attraction to and hatred for her informant that clearly mirrors the colonial project's love-hate relationship with Native peoples. Previously unable to make Rachel provide her with simple "anecdotes" for her doctoral thesis, the narrator seems motivated early on by Rachel's audacity to challenge her authority, both in the real sense as Rachel refuses to be a good informant and in the "meta" sense in that Rachel assumes control over the final narrative. In a telling quote that reflects the narrator's simultaneous desire to own Rachel's stories and her own lack of power in the situation, the narrator reveals, "I wanted to know what she knew and how she knew it . . . not knowing she'd have me eating the word myth like it was cod liver oil" (19). Choking on her own intentions, the narrator is once again refused the easy consumption of Rachel's knowledge. Instead, the narrator is quickly drawn into writing the story that Rachel wants to tell—a story about racism, gendered violence, and institutional power, as well as a story about a young family's daily life on an extensive and modern farm in northern Michigan. It is only within this larger story that the narrator is given small bits of "traditional" stories but only as Rachel tells them, filled with inconsistencies and riddled with the occasional rant on modern racism and contemporary Indian experience.

Where other Native novels are more literary or subtle in their critiques, Beardslee's text is bold and mirrors with overt cynicism the reality of racism in her characters' life experience. As Rachel tells the narrator, in her part of the country, which she characterizes as the "New South," "Racism is close and in your face" (14). The text's strength (or weakness, depending on one's taste) is the sense of urgency and outrage that underscores Rachel's lectures as she runs through alarming statistics such as the fact that many Native college graduates fail to gain jobs that reflect their credentials. In the chapter "Separate Is Not Equal," the narrator is forced to reconcile Rachel's story of abuse and harassment in public education with her own role as an education scholar in that same system. And she is resentful of Rachel for this complication. The narrator blames Rachel for "constantly pull[ing] the rug out from under" her, asking that she "look at her experiences with the public school system in terms of ethics. All I'd wanted were anecdotes" (94). When the narrator tries to steer Rachel in the direction of such anecdotes and away from real analysis, Rachel admonishes her and tells her, "If you're going to write about Indians and problems with the education system, you've got to stop using past tense" (108). This is not what the narrator intends to write about, although ultimately she gives a poignant account of Rachel's struggle to protect her children from an abusive ex-husband, a sadistic school administrator, and hostile teachers.

The story Rachel constructs through the narrator is also a fine trickster tale that begins with the opening story cycle about Manaboozhou and his wife,

which Rachel returns to throughout the novel. These moments in the story do more than provide an overall theme to the larger narrative; these stories serve to place Ojibwe worldviews at the center of Rachel's politics and logic as she uses them to "teach," though not in a trite way. As previously mentioned, the novel mimics the forms of captivity and ethnography in order to expose the constructed nature and power dynamics of these narratives. At the same time, the novel positions the trickster narrative as the antidote to these disempowering ways of telling Native life stories. The novel also gives trickster narratives added weight since these stories are used in the text to reveal just how little the narrator—and quite possibly the reader—know about their complexity. In her trickster tales, Rachel connects her lessons to philosophy, social ethics, and complex mathematics. It is in this storytelling that Rachel finally confronts the narrator's initial motivations.

The confrontation between ethnographer and informer takes place in a chapter appropriately titled "Cultural Appropriation." Here is where Rachel brings together the theme of racism and the act of telling stories. When the narrator finally informs Rachel that she does not want any more stories about racism, Rachel angrily responds with the novel's most prominent argument about the nature of "traditional" stories in a living culture and community. She tells the narrator that her stories about contemporary experience are traditional in that all such stories are "about real-life issues. They sing, praise, desecrate, and tear apart ideas" (111). Moreover, in this scene Rachel asserts her position of control in the whole process. She tells the narrator, "I know exactly what you are trying to do. And I'm fighting back" (112).

Shortly after this dispute, the narrator leaves the family farm and heads home, and like all captives and ethnographers, she leaves with the feeling that she will not be able to shake off Rachel's influence. The narrative closes with an important traditional story about the Windigoog, framing the story of the cannibalistic monsters within a story of relocation and boarding school tragedies. There is much to interpret in this telling; however, the gist of Rachel's critique is simply that targeting children is one of the most devastating ways to attack a community. Yet, avoiding the negative ending for Native peoples found in the other narrative forms mentioned, *Rachel's Children* closes with a return to the original trickster story-cycle that is on the verge of starting all over again. And, as usual, the narrator's protest that she has heard it all before is quickly dismissed by Rachel, who teases her with a "seven generations" story not only to underscore the responsibility of educators to future generations but also to simply keep the conversation going.

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