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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Miracle: A Novel. By Leo Dubray.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9j26d5xq>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 29(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2005-06-01

DOI

10.17953

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Miracle: A Novel. By Leo Dubray. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005. 160 pages. \$17.95 cloth.

Having married and divorced an officer of the law, I have to admit that I was not thrilled to read a story marketed as “an unvarnished account of the day and night life of a beat cop” (University of Oklahoma press release). I was, however, intrigued by what this novel about a mixed-blood police officer might say to literary critics interested in Native crime fiction and in the University of Oklahoma Press’s American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series, which often highlights important works from and about authors who are well established in the field. Indeed, what this novel offers might be more intriguing to the everyday reader of crime fiction than to scholars in Native studies. While Leo Dubray’s novel has moments of finely tuned description and comforting, though depressing, themes for twenty-first-century readers of cop fiction, most scholars in the field will find the text structurally inconsistent, possibly offensive, and highly questionable as a novel on par with others previously published in this series, such as Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*.

To be fair, Dubray is adept at using the conventions of crime fiction’s hard-boiled style to create characters who are at once the all-too-familiar “types” of victim, street thug, or corrupt officer, as well as the types of characters who make the raw edges and depravity depicted seem authentic and real. This authenticity can be attributed to the fact that Dubray filters his descriptions through his main character, Matthew, an older beat-cop whose observations are an interesting mix of an experienced and detached officer and a searching and empathetic loner. Matthew’s perspective is also fascinating because it demonstrates how horrible events such as suicide, child-killings, elder abuse, and the abandonment of newborns become flattened by the routine nature and quick pace of going from call to call without time for Matthew or readers to process the emotional impact of witnessing corrupted innocence or isolated despair. For this reason, the reader begins to understand how the officers’ interpersonal relationships in the novel deteriorate into narcissistic affairs between cops and nurses, wives, and neighbors where intimacy is not sustained and sex is conquest or revenge with little emotion.

Miracle is structured as a series of sketches lacking a narrative thread other than, ironically enough, the general themes of missed connections, lost intimacy between lovers, friends, and colleagues, and all of their chances at redemption. However, its strength is in creating moments in which Matthew must confront different aspects of his own loneliness in the faces of those he meets on the job, as well as those in his personal life. Loneliness is well defined in this novel and captured in small moments rather beautifully, such as the description of the bulldozing of an old willow tree that had been Matthew’s and his fellow cops’ hideout from the job. Matthew watches as the tree’s freshly unearthed “black roots writhe for a moment like fingers searching for something to grab onto” (129). This description of grasping roots is a compelling and revealing metaphor that might have given the overall narrative added weight and even the easy but useful moment for a fuller engagement with Matthew’s Native identity, something I never thought

I would wish for in a Native text. However, the novel never really takes advantage of this metaphor's potential or links it to Native experience and, left in small measures such as this line, it proves ineffectual. Without a solid foundation then, the novel's final chapter, "Miracle," which is clearly trying to make a statement about holding on to something in the face of great loss, leaves the reader dissatisfied and confused.

Overall, I wish I could say my problems with this novel could simply be attributed to my personal encounters with the men in blue or simply a matter of literary taste. However, I tend to enjoy the unadorned language and other straightforward conventions of hard-boiled fiction (it's a fine escape from the "dense and lyrical"), and I still have a fondness for my time as a member of the small club of "cops' wives" (knowing where one could speed in city limits is always useful). Yet, as a feminist scholar of Native literature, I have to comment on the frequent and crude descriptions of women and sexual relationships that seem to be more of a stilted reliance on convention rather than a starkly honest portrayal of sexuality, often used in works such as this to emphasize the selfishness of modern life. Instead, any sexual reference in this novel seems thrown in for the giddy pleasure of typing "naughty" words or for the less benign reason of making women seem far more vacuous than the men in the novel. For example, in a chapter titled "Beyond Reasonable Doubt," Matthew's colleague David proves his conquest of another cop's girlfriend by having her step out of his patrol car and approach Matthew wearing only a hat and black combat boots. When she reaches Matthew's car, she leans forward placing bare breasts against his arm and tells him, "I'm good with my mouth . . . You want a blow-job?" (49). Unfortunately, she's rather representative of most of the cop's wives and girlfriends in the novel, which I admittedly may take a bit too personally. Yet I rarely see the literary value in describing your main character "scratch[ing] his nuts" as a response to his wife's admission that she can barely walk down the stairs after a night of sex (20). Even more outrageous is the way in which Matthew's preoccupation with all things breast-related is handled. He has a penchant to describe practically every woman's nipple in the first seventy-five pages, exemplified by the silly comparison of a nurse's "fondling" of a pen to the way Matthew would "touch a woman's nipple" (75). I hate to be prudish but I have to ask—vivid though it may be—when, if ever, is a nipple simile necessary? What's more, the sexual descriptions often border on embarrassingly outdated (and not on purpose), such as describing a new girlfriend as someone's "chippy" (42).

Perhaps the biggest problem that I have with the novel is the marketing of the book as a Native text. From what I can tell, the author makes little claim to Native identity and, more importantly, the novel's *story* does little, dare I say "authentic," with the fact that "Indianness" is an aspect of Matthew's character. Other than visiting an Indian casino on one call, finding out that his father is Indian too (!)—making him a not-so-mixed mixed-blood in a clichéd chapter of father-son angst—and an occasional ribbing by ex-wife and coworkers, all references to Matthew's heritage seem sprinkled in for color (yes, pun intended). I re-read over and over the handful of sentences and few paragraphs on Indian anything, trying generously to ground the novel

in some contemporary Native literary tradition. Is this a work in the tradition of James Welch? No, not enough assimilationist conflict. McNickle? No, no policy references. Owens? No, not enough mixed-blood angst. Hillerman? Admittedly, I began to forget my initial goal. My point is not so much that there is a checklist that can be generated to determine a novel's "Nativity" but that the opportunities available to publish new Native writers and develop a richer literary landscape are few and far between. I could not help feeling as I read this novel that the energy and resources poured into a marginally Native story (if simply adding Indian into the mix makes it so) were misdirected from a Native author whose work could be that cutting-edge text or nationalist masterpiece that will break the field wide open. Or, at least have a few more references to frybread, wild rice, or an actual tribal affiliation! Lest anyone be offended, I am only half-serious—sort of.

As a final comment, there have been recent calls for contemporary Native literature to move beyond narratives of Indian-white conflict and post-contact trauma in favor of narratives that represent the multiple layers and varied interests of contemporary Native life or that simply tell a Native story. However, sprinkling in a few generic Indian references or simply making Native identity an adjective is not a way to answer such a call for new topics in Native literature but a very old and cheap way to create an "outsider" everyman in contemporary American fiction. What worries this reviewer is that works published in a series titled "American Indian Literature and Critical Studies" are taken to be some of the best of what Native writers have to offer. One would hope that publishers of series such as this one would search out first-time Native novelists that push the boundaries of what we call Native literature in some provocative and useful way, not make Native representation a stock convention or simply a way to get published.

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Native Modernism: The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser. Edited by Truman Lowe. Seattle: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian Art and University of Washington Press. 2005. 128 pages. \$35.00 paper.

Native Modernism, edited by Truman Lowe, is a sensitive, exceptional, and much-appreciated work on the careers of artists George Morrison and Allan Houser, whose voices are heard in many narrative passages throughout this work. Both men saw themselves simply as artists; their American Indian identity was but one aspect of their work. Each also believed that critics treated Native aesthetic production as less than equal compared to that of non-Native artists. For Morrison and Houser, it was important to be considered an artist first and foremost.

The foreword by Richard West notes that each artist possessed a significant and distinctive artistic vision. Neither created "Indian-only" artwork. The influences of twentieth-century international art movements are represented