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Genre, History, Ecology: James Welch's *Fools Crow* and the Reagan Anti- Environmental Revolution

JAMES WELCH'S *FOOLS CROW* (1986) IS KNOWN FOR THE REVISIONIST force of its historical realism. The titular Pikuni brave in *Fools Crow* (originally named White Man's Dog) takes his adult name after defeating the chief of the rival Crow tribe. Despite the title's origins in an episode of violence, the novel centers on the peaceable lifestyle of a Blackfoot community threatened by the expansion of the American nation-state. The local violence between the Pikuni and the Crow contrasts sharply with the industrial-scale conflict, social and economic disruption, and ecological consequences of the conquest and settling of the Montana territory. The juxtaposition between these forms of violence, as Sarah Martin argues, subordinates Welch's "aspiration to recover historical voices" to "the more urgent and contestatory attempt to reverse historical silencing and confront the reasons for [the contemporary] resistance to understanding Native American experience in American culture" (91). Welch's account of the expansion of the American state and the consequent displacement and decimation of the Blackfeet maps a contested historical terrain—one that more accurately represents American myths regarding westward expansion.

The novel contributes to revisionist accounts of American expansion not only through documenting atrocities committed against indigenous tribes in the Montana territory but also through its engagement with formal problems in genre and literary history. Critics including Barbara Cook, Joseph L. Coulombe, James J. Donahue, Sean Teuton, and Alan Velie have explored realism and the historical novel as

literary traditions that Welch adapts to contest the hegemony of American or Western colonial history. This line of reading of *Fools Crow* as a revisionist iteration of the historical novel is both illuminating and apropos to Welch's intentions for the book. In an interview given the year before Welch completed the novel, he says,

I'm trying to write from the inside-out, because most historical novels are written from the outside looking in. My main character is a member of a particular band, and I'm talking a lot about camp life and ceremonial life, those day to day practical things that they did to survive—and to live quite decently as a matter of fact. [. . .] The white people are the real strangers. They're the threatening presence out there all the time. (McFarland 4–5)

The inversion of the historical novel's conventional perspective defamiliarizes history, or at least as history is often oriented around European and American civilization. In Welch's turn on the historical novel, the representatives of the American nation-state become a strange, threatening presence, spectating from somewhere on the narrative's outskirts. Welch thus frames *Fools Crow* in such a way that denies the nation-state its place at the center of the novel.

Given this complex and critical use of historical realism, it is not surprising that Welch also draws on other conventions common to the Western literary tradition. In particular, *Fools Crow* employs certain bildungsroman tropes in order to examine the concepts of citizenship and national belonging implicit in the narrative arc of education or maturation. Even as historical realism conventionally takes white civilization and the nation-state as its orienting terms, the classic bildungsroman, as Jed Esty explains, “stabilizes the protagonist's aging process within and against the backdrop of the modern nation” (40). The nation provides an anchorage or site of collective mooring for the subjective development of the hero, and as such Esty argues that the protagonist in the classic bildungsroman follows a trajectory dependent upon narratives of modern progress, the possession of property rights, autonomous subjectivity, and the social responsibility required by the obligations of mature citizenship. This trajectory comes under scrutiny in *Fools Crow* as many

of these tokens of “education” or modern formation are foreclosed to the novel’s protagonist. Indeed, Welch’s novel suggests that the bildungsroman’s logic of citizenship relies historically and culturally on the exclusion of indigenous peoples.

This revisionist work provides a venue for considering the historical conditions of both American expansionism and indigenous resistance, particularly in terms of the environmental debates of the 1980s. This decade’s so-called Reagan revolution in economics corresponded with a devastating series of setbacks in the federal environmental agenda established in the 1970s—setbacks that particularly affected indigenous communities in the United States. This history of American political ecology provides a significant context for the cultural stakes of Welch’s novel. Indeed, this essay shows that the turn on the conventions of the bildungsroman in *Fools Crow* relates to the novel’s engagement with the environmental policy of the 1980s. The bildungsroman is an ingenious set of formal or generic tropes for this engagement because, as Joseph Slaughter observes, this genre’s plot structure contains deep ambiguities. According to Slaughter, the plot of the bildungsroman “keep[s] the broken promise of the Enlightenment with the individual’s reabsorption into universal humanity through the ‘natural’ medium of the nation-state” (Slaughter 92). While including individualistic and even radically democratic forms of protest against entrenched social norms, this generic tradition nonetheless *naturalizes* the nation, as if the integrity of individual freedom and dignity were preserved through incorporating the self into a “secular” state community as the natural political home of the human.

The failed bildungsroman in *Fools Crow* animates a critique of the environmental and indigenous costs implicit in prevailing American accounts of national belonging or secular citizenship. Through the novel’s engagement with the formal aspects of genre, *Fools Crow* opens up an alternative vision of ecological citizenship. The tropes of a generic tradition thus become the contested theater for resisting the environmental policies of the 1980s while also imagining competing forms of ecological and political thinking. The novel registers these forms of thinking on multiple historical registers: even as *Fools Crow* depicts the burgeoning conflict between the Blackfoot confederacy and the American nation during the 1870s, the novel also reflects on the debates

within political ecology and the exploitation of indigenous lands during the 1970s and 1980s.

CLIMATE SCIENCE IN THE REAGAN ERA AND THE
BILDUNGSROMAN IN FOOLS CROW

The structures of scientific research and environmental advocacy underwent vast changes during the 1980s. For example, Spencer Weart explains that the recently established National Climate Program Office was quickly opposed when Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency. The science of global warming bore the brunt of this opposition: “The new administration laid plans to slash funding for CO₂ studies in particular, deeming such research unnecessary” (Weart 139). The credibility and institutional existence of the Council on Environmental Quality was also challenged after Reagan’s inauguration, even as the new president replaced administrators in the Environmental Protection Agency with partisan figures hostile to environmental regulation (Schaller 50). Michael E. Kraft suggests that these radical revisions were likely in response to business groups and conservatives who experienced rising costs as a result of federal regulation of health, safety, and the environment (Kraft 37). As a feature of such pressures, climate science was not only defunded but openly scorned, such that the idea of “science-first” advocacy was called into question. In short, the administration made environmental science a partisan issue. Indeed, the Reagan administration prompted the Department of Energy (DOE) to renege on funding promised to James Hansen, a scientist who published a report on the relation between a warming planet and the “greenhouse effect” and then forwarded the research to the *New York Times* science writer Walter Sullivan. The withdrawal of funding was either retaliation or a necessary consequence of the fact that the Reagan administration cut the DOE budget by more than a billion dollars (Howe 123). The point, as Weart puts it, is that “everything connected with atmospheric change had become politically sensitive” (139). Inquiry into humanity’s place in a nonhuman world became the target of partisan political contests as, for instance, the coal industry countered studies on CO₂ emissions by funding and publishing its own research, which assured the public that “benign economic progress . . . could never cause long-range damage” (140). The challenges to science-first advocacy thus found that the very terms of knowledge production were becoming contested, and

the Reagan administration seemed to prefer corporations and industries rather than the scientists whose research suggested needed changes in public policy and environmental regulation (140–41, 148).

Given the myriad ways in which the Reagan administration used the Office of Management and Budget to reallocate funds from regulatory efforts, the crisis of institutional political will and environmental protection during the 1980s is retrospectively not surprising. The Carter administration had also scaled back an initially ambitious environmental policy during its last years (Howe 121). However, the diminished ambitions of Carter's energy policy still stood in sharp contrast to what Samuel Hays describes as the "Reagan Antienvironmental Revolution," which involved the control of environmental policy by pro-business, pro-industry acolytes (Hays 491). Given the exploitation of natural resources during the preceding centuries of industrialization, it may be an overstatement to describe Reagan's policies as a "revolution." Instead, to borrow a phrase now common when describing the postwar economic order, the decade preceding the Reagan administration is more like an interregnum between gilded ages of environmental decline and industrial exploitation (see Cowie and Salvatore). Nonetheless, the beginning of the Reagan administration marks a clear break with the policy of the 1970s. As Joshua Howe explains, "Reagan tapped Ann Gorsuch, a leader of the Colorado legislature's Republican Right and a lawyer for mining and agriculture interests, to head the EPA. Gorsuch, in turn, named fifteen like-minded subordinates, eleven of whom had ties to the very industries the EPA was supposed to regulate" (124). Even as public funding for climate science research underwent vast and deleterious restructuring, the regulatory edifice of environmental protection established during the 1970s was gutted.

These political shifts presupposed a form of political thinking that separated human beings from a wider ecological system. While often this separation was maintained through research produced by industry-funded science, it also regularly had religious and cultural justifications. For example, Reagan appointed the evangelical James Watt as secretary of the interior—a position that would ostensibly oversee such agencies as the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service. When explaining his vision for the nation in 1981, James Watt declared, "My responsibility is to follow the Scriptures which call upon us to occupy the land until Jesus returns" ("James Watt and the

Puritan Ethic”). The government, according to Watt, exists to establish a relation of dominion to the land—a view in keeping with a particular interpretation of Watt’s religious tradition. Beyond such a religiously inflected philosophy of humanity’s position of dominance over other species and the world’s resources, the “Reagan revolution” in environmental policy also recast the idea of citizenship in economic terms, such that the relationship of the state and its citizens to the environment was construed according to the protection of private property. The federal environmental protections formulated during the 1970s transmuted during the 1980s into the state’s responsibility to ensure the expansion and competition of certain industries. (Notably, renewable energies and other competitors of the oil industry were excluded from this form of economic competition [Howe 120–23].)

In addition to weakening the regulatory structures and institutional support for environmental protection, the Reagan administration also created task forces and supported policies that threatened native peoples’ resources and undermined agencies tasked with protecting tribal sovereignty. In particular, the sociologist Al Gedicks recounts that the administration exploited a “carefully orchestrated hysteria over strategic minerals” in the United States. To assuage public and corporate concerns raised by the American Mining Congress’s declaration of a “Resources War” that threatened national defense, the Reagan administration proposed a “New Indian Policy,” which “would incorporate Indian resources into a program of U.S. ‘energy independence’” (Gedicks 41). Of course, this proposal in itself merely continues longstanding appropriations of native lands by European settlers and then the American nation-state (see Cronon). However, this exploitation intensified during the Cold War era, when indigenous lands and reservations regularly served as sites for testing weapons and dumping nuclear waste (see, for example, Kuletz 111–15). The Reagan administration admittedly pursued a policy of “self-determination,” in contrast to the federal Indian Termination Policy established during the 1940s. However, as Eve Darian-Smith explains, “The self-determination legislation of the 1970s and 1980s under Nixon, Ford, and Reagan (the latter drastically cutting all funding of Indian affairs) was consistent with a conservative domestic agenda that sought to reduce federal costs in many social services areas through privatization and deregulation” (371).

As this gutted form of self-determination suggests, the Reagan administration sanctioned a broader form of political thinking in which the state guarantees the conditions for private citizens to develop, use, or consume natural resources—a guarantee that itself relies on longstanding humanistic assumptions about the secular nature of citizenship. “Secular” in this sense places the human subject at the center of history, the production of knowledge, and political belonging. This tradition of thought was formulated in the modern era by philosophers such as Giambattista Vico, whose philosophy of human history in *Scienza Nuova* (1725) counters Descartes’ dogmatic form of reason. Or, in a different vein of secular thinking, John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) offers an empiricist account of subjectivity, in which the ability to determine meaning is one that “Man has wholly in himself” (1979: II.i.4). The inclusion of reason within the purview of human nature—rather than a divine will—necessarily distinguishes our species from the wider ecology of a nonhuman world. In this sense, then, the shifts in Reagan-era environmental policy not only found justification in cultural and religious beliefs but also participated in a longstanding tradition of liberal political philosophy that delimited the contours of history and the boundaries of political significance in distinctly anthropocentric terms.

The ecological assumptions of this form of political thinking come under scrutiny in *Fools Crow* as the bildungsroman’s trajectory of national belonging ultimately fails as an adequate narrative template for Welch’s protagonist. Before he takes the name *Fools Crow*, the protagonist of Welch’s novel is known as *White Man’s Dog*, a designation he receives from following an old storyteller, *Victory Robe White Man* (220). Indeed, after the fashion of the classic bildungsroman, there are both personal and social circumstances that create instability for this young brave: “Not so lucky was *White Man’s Dog*. He had little to show for his eighteen winters. His father, *Rides-at-the-door*, had many horses and three wives. He himself had three horses and no wives. His animals were puny, not a blackhorn runner among them” (3). The economic situation and the social standing of *White Man’s Dog* seem to replicate the trope of frustrated youth, an agonizing self whose passage from adolescence to maturity is materially blocked. Even *White Man’s Dog*’s few possessions are “puny,” not even sufficient for hunting bison or other major game necessary for supporting a family in the Blackfoot way of

life. Like Goethe's Wilhelm, White Man's Dog is "restless" (Welch 3); he is discontent as he resides on the cusp of adulthood without the significant achievements that represent maturity, personal fulfillment, or social standing (cf. Goethe 113, 143). Welch's youthful hero had prayed many times "to the Above Ones for stronger medicine but he knew that wasn't the way. It was up to him, perhaps with the help of a many-faces man, to find his own power" (Welch 3-4). Signaling the external pressures that produce the conventional struggles in classic bildungsroman, White Man's Dog initially assumes that his maturation must occur through self-creation. His hopes for finding "his own power" suggest the degree to which autonomy and self-determination are integral to his early understanding of the passage into adulthood.

This early conception about the passage from youth to adulthood requires White Man's Dog to travel through the space of the burgeoning American nation. He longs to visit the "land of the whiskey traders" because, as the narrator explains, "he had heard of their skinned-tree houses, full of all those things a young man would need to make himself rich" (Welch 4). Private property and the markers of wealth initially appear to be prerequisites for maturity. White Man's Dog is thus determined to acquire a many-shots gun, for then, he thinks,

he could bring about his own luck. He would have plenty of wives, children, horses, meat. He would have his own lodge, and his wives would cook boss ribs and blackhorn tongues while he smoked, told stories, recounted his war honors. The other men would be silent and respectful as he told of the day he had finished off the Parted Hairs [a rival tribe] and made their women cry. (4)

White Man's Dog's youthful dream draws on a series of tropes common to the bildungsroman. Within this matrix of generic conventions, the narrative hero occupies an uncertain situation and, through some form of acquisition, the protagonist enters an economically constructed space of adulthood. The "mature" protagonist, in other words, often finds some resolved union with the social conditions of wealth production and, often more abstractly, the national setting for those conditions. The narrative trajectory of the bildungsroman entails the acquisition of property or tokens of wealth, which either construct or at least represent a socially stable position.

Despite White Man's Dog's frustrated desire for material acquisition, these conditions for maturation are in fact under investigation in *Fools Crow*. White Man's Dog desires "a many-shots" and European horses, as if these forms of property could provide a materially stable space for his passage into a mature social role (63). Yet the novel soon suggests that the narrative arc of acquisition, at least insofar as it depends upon the material goods of the American settlers, is largely chimerical for the young Pikuni brave. For example, the narrator recalls, "Some bands, like the Grease Melters, had already begun to depend too much on the Napikwans. Ever since the big treaty they had journeyed to the agent's house for the commodities that were promised to them. Most of the time they returned empty-handed. And more and more of the Napikwans moved onto Pikuni lands" (94). The commercial relationship with the citizens of the nation-state is a broken and uncertain conduit for economic assimilation. Indeed, while the trope of maturation in the classic bildungsroman relies on property acquisition, *Fools Crow* recounts that such structures for *bildung* in fact historically facilitated the expansion of the nation-state through the territorial and economic "settling" of native lands.

The imbrication of property acquisition and the passage to adulthood incites tension among native tribes and facilitates the expansion of the nation-state through trade. However, such a cultural-economic arrangement also undermines the indigenous social space that White Man's Dog occupies as a young man. The chief Mad Plume asserts as much: "Look around you, White Man's Dog, do you see many of our younger men? No, they are off hunting for themselves, or drunk with the white man's water, or stealing their horses. They do not bring anything back to their people. There is no center here" (98). For those outside the nation-state's terms for belonging, the constellation of tropes orbiting around acquisition lead to collective dissolution. While the nation-state expands and becomes centralized, the non-state spaces contract and, in what appears to be an allusion to a line from W. B. Yeats, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." As a result of the economic disruption caused by the westward expansion of American settlers, indigenous communities collapse. The tribe has been displaced as the center for the passage into adulthood.

Welch's representation of the disruption caused by American expansion is rooted in the historical fracturing of native peoples. This fracturing occurred not only on cultural and economic registers, as

Welch's novel presents it, but also through federal policy that began to reorganize native peoples' access to their land. For example, a significant feature of this disruption was the growth of federal policies during the 1880s that aimed to impose the norms of private property ownership on native peoples. The Allotment Act of 1887, in particular, parceled out "small landholdings to individual Indians, interspersed with white settler holdings to create a checkerboard effect" (Darian-Smith 369). The program of allotment forced "native peoples to relate to the land as individual property-owning farmers rather than as communities collectively living with the land" (369). This program thus served as an economic mechanism for ostensibly assimilating—but effectively decentering—Indian tribes. Such an effect was obvious to the former Interior Secretary Carl Schurz, who wrote at the time of allotment, "When the Indians are individual property owners their tribal cohesion will necessarily relax, and gradually disappear. They will have advanced an immense step in the direction of the white man's ways" (qtd. in Banner 268). For Schurz, property ownership is the antidote to tribalism; it is the force that relaxes the collective center.

These American policies during the latter half of the nineteenth century were no less pernicious than the more well-known forms of federal brutality and violence. Indeed, even as some of the distinctions between the Pikuni and the Napikwans or white settlers become blurred in Welch's novel, the scales of violence between these groups remain markedly incommensurate. As Rides-at-the-door, the father of White Man's Dog, insists, "These Napikwans are different from us. They would not stop until all the Pikunis had been killed off" (90). The violence of the white settlers, in contrast to the intertribal warfare of the Blackfeet, contains the possibility of total war. Such a distinction is redolent of the nuclear anxieties of the Cold War era that are contemporaneous with the publication of *Fools Crow*: the Napikwans are a people for whom a scorched earth is not only a possible strategy but also a governing impulse. What's more, the distinction in the scales of violence suggests that Western narratives of acquisition are situated within the context of state aggression. In Stephen Crane's influential bildungsroman, for example, Henry Fleming is drawn into the conflict of the Civil War because of a tacit connection he makes between his emergence from adolescence and the means of violent force. Yet Fleming's desire to attain glory and worldly experience through connection

to “adult” objects, such as rifles, is connected in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) to a statist theater of violence. The generic structure that relies on acquisition finds its larger context in the consolidation of state power.

In *Fools Crow*, in contrast, the acquisition of “adult” objects increasingly unsettles the association between violence and maturity. The classic tropes of the bildungsroman and the development of the initially frustrated hero continue through most of the first two sections of the novel. The raid with Yellow Kidney, for example, provides White Man’s Dog with an opportunity to gain worldly experience. When White Man’s Dog kills a Crow youth on the raid, he gains respect from the community: “many of the men had honored him with scalp songs. His father had given him a war club he had taken from the Crows. And his brother and the other young men looked at him with respect” (63). However, this act of adult violence is deeply disturbing to White Man’s Dog, such that he cannot forget “the feeling in his arm as his scalping knife struck bone in the youth’s back” (63). This self-doubt functions as one among many instances in which Welch’s novel is at pains to curb a romanticized idealization of Blackfoot life, on the one hand, and to cast suspicion on the violence often integral to the *bildung* of a protagonist’s adolescent self, on the other. Indeed, Welch’s refusal to idealize the indigenous past becomes even more pronounced as White Man’s Dog attempts to rationalize the murder: “the youth would have warned the village. He had no choice but to kill” (63). The novel creates space for skepticism about the tribes’ warring conflicts through its trailing ellipses, and White Man’s Dog likewise continues to have reservations about intertribal violence. Yet these reservations are set in the context of a contrasting scale of destruction on the part of the American nation’s westward expansion. It is therefore part of his fraught passage to adulthood for White Man’s Dog to doubt both an alienating narrative of material acquisition and the conventions and practices of his tribe.

Yet again, *Fools Crow* is not a straightforward modern *bildung*. Welch’s novel eventually disentangles the protagonist’s maturation from the liberal tradition of property ownership that Esty and others have shown to be characteristic of the classic bildungsroman. As Esty explains, the bildungsroman relies on a “plot of national closure” in which the unsettled conditions surrounding the hero are “resolved through an alignment between the protagonist’s end-narrative in time

and the nation's boundary-limit in space" (50). In this view, the *bildung* originates in socio-economic uncertainty and resolves in the space of the nation-state; as a result, such narratives construe maturation and state-sanctioned private property as inextricable. Cast in the terms of liberal property rights, the nation-state provides the backdrop or topographical conditions in which the subjectivity of the novel's protagonist is constituted. John Locke's *The Second Treatise of Government* offers an influential formulation of this modern liberal idea regarding the convergence of selfhood and property. In this treatise Locke defines property in individualistic terms, such that the subject's possession of private space and personal objects are integral components of self-governance. Locke explains,

Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joynd to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. (V.xxvii.287–88)

The self through its labor has the ability to "mix" objects and spaces in the world, such that the external is possessed as part of one's inner life. The external is subsumed as property of the self. The making of private property is, in other words, a process in which the individual subject also produces the contents of itself. *Fools Crow* not only challenges the idea that "inferior Creatures" are the common possessions of "all Men," but also questions the validity of the notion that the self is able to set apart spaces in the world as "his own," as if such spaces were constitutive of that individual's subjectivity. In Welch's novel, the external or nonhuman is exploited, manipulated, and destroyed, but it is never subsumed as a property of the human self.

These elements of the political philosophy underwriting the *bildungsroman* tradition become increasingly inadequate in *Fools Crow*. In particular, national narratives of citizenship and development become not merely incongruous but outright destructive as *Fools Crow* receives a series of dire visions at the end of the novel. He embarks on

what Bette Weidman calls a “dream quest,” which is noteworthy for the way it provokes an ecological response to a national political crisis (Weidman 93–95). Through this sequence of visions, *Fools Crow* is brought into a different realm of time and space from the one being “squeezed” and structured by the nation-state (Welch 256). On this quest he encounters Feather Woman, a mythic figure who was once married to a star. Feather Woman was cast from the house of Sun Chief after digging up a sacred gourd in order to look down from the floor of heaven upon the Pikuni people. Feather Woman offers *Fools Crow* a vision of the future of the Blackfoot people through designs on a yellow skin. The first of four visions features the disease at the Sun Dance festival, which decimates the Blackfoot confederacy. The second is the slaughter of the Pikunis, which occurs in Part V of the novel, and quickly following this violence is a third vision of the dwindling of the blackhorn species. The death of a people and the crisis of a species are placed on a shared continuum of consequences. In contrast to the notion that industrial progress is benign, the novel depicts the decimation of non-state communities and nonhuman species as the malignant products of westward expansion. To separate the settling of the American frontier from its ecological destruction, then, would amount to an erasure of historical memory.

In *Fools Crow*'s fourth and final vision, the classic bildungsroman's education trope and enclosure plot converge in a disturbing manner. *Fools Crow* sees a future vision of “a long white building with four of the Napikwan square ice-shields on each of the long sides” (361). It becomes clear that this building is a schoolhouse, likely one of the boarding schools that historically served Native American and settler children, ostensibly to assimilate the former into national life. *Fools Crow* recognizes common Pikuni places—“The building was not far from a grove of big-leaf trees that marked the course of the Milk River”—yet the only non-whites in the vision occupy an ominous place (361). There are children outside, “running and playing, laughing. . . . But a small group of children stood on the edge, near the white building. They were dark-skinned, and they watched the other children” (361). Where once these Pikuni children would have resided on non-state land, they now reside on the margins of space that is representative of an American national *bildung*. *Fools Crow* observes that the children are dressed like the Napikwan, but “they stood timidly a short distance from a large

white woman who held a brass bell" (361). This future vision underwrites Fools Crow's suspicion—explored in a contemporary setting in Welch's later work, such as *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979)—that assimilation under the terms and norms of national citizenship often becomes a form of alienation. Its rigid terms of existence—its narrative formulae—have not culminated in the inclusion of the Blackfeet into a national topography. Indeed, youth itself is estranged and displaced in Fools Crow's final vision, despite the fact that the children are superficially assimilated into the structuring power of the nation-state. This method of inclusion is a transmuted form of exclusion; the narrative structure of belonging and maturity culminates in the decimation of an indigenous people.

In Fools Crow's fourth vision, the terms of the classic bildungsroman not only fail as a narrative template for indigenous communities, but also block the inclusion of native youth from space purportedly structured for the sake of education and belonging. The non-Western and non-state children in Fools Crow's vision become foreigners on the fringes of national space. What takes precedence in this fourth vision is what Lisa Lowe describes as the bildungsroman's "idealized 'national' form of subjectivity" (98). The marginalized state of these Native American children suggests that, for Welch, the revisionist aspirations of historical realism may collapse under the weight of a history of US expansion. This fourth vision nonetheless insists on the fact that the conditions of possibility for state citizenship historically depend upon the conquest of a people previously independent of the nation-state. The novel corrects and recalls what American national history has rescripted and expunged.

CITIZENSHIP, HISTORY, AND ECOLOGY

Fools Crow employs the tropes of the classic bildungsroman in order to display its inadequacies as a narrative trajectory for those outside the structures of the nation-state. This engagement with genre registers dissent from the cultural narratives underlying the political and economic forms of thinking that were increasingly common—and increasingly destructive—during the 1980s. Also, Welch's contribution to the tradition of historical realism recuperates and represents the complexities of an indigenous culture that national history often elides. Beyond these interventions in generic traditions, Welch's novel also presents

the Pikuni way of life in the representational terms of a wider ecological scale. Rather than romanticizing an indigenous connection to the land, the ecological contours of *Fools Crow* are consistent with the novel's political and literary concerns. In particular, time and history take on ecological dimensions in such a way that implies a political philosophy as much as an historical form of memory. Ecology and genre meet again in the novel's use of the tropes of history and deep time.

The chronotope of deep time in *Fools Crow* works in concert with its interrogation of genre to disrupt the ideas about national time that conventionally orient the bildungsroman. As Mikhail Bakhtin describes it, the chronotope "determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature. . . . The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic" (85). The trope of time and space constitutes and expresses the "image of man," which is to say that spatial and temporal relationships signify an implicit understanding of the human condition. Developing Bakhtin's claims, Franco Moretti demonstrates that history and time often become embodied in various tropes in the modern novel as ways for imagining a space with objective limits construed along national lines. The national chronotope—such as the bourgeois business or enclosed private property—becomes a metaphor that structures time and space within the concentric bounds of the nation-state (Moretti 19, 135–42). For Welch, however, the tropes of time and history take on scalar vastness and ecological contours, such that they become disentangled from the nation-state and are instead situated in a different register. In particular, *Fools Crow* disputes what Dipesh Chakrabarty describes as the "age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (201). In other words, the invocation of deep time in Welch's novel breaches the binary of human and natural history—a breach that resonates deeply with the political stakes of dissent during the Reagan-era anti-environmental revolution by complicating its implicit views of secular citizenship.

The ecological contours of *Fools Crow* inflect time and space through a set of structuring metaphors that are distinct from the national ones expressed in classic bildungsromane such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (see Esty 42). For example, in *Fools Crow* when General Sully meets with a small band of Blackfoot leaders, the American translator explains that the chiefs "are friends to the American people. And [General Sully] extends the greetings of the Grandfather, who lives in

that place where the sun rises. It is for the Grandfather that the General speaks" (278). In this darkly ironic appropriation of indigenous beliefs, the one who structures the days and nights is not Sun Chief but the American nation-state, symbolically present in the General but located geographically in the eastern center of the state's political power. The General's "Grandfather" is thus the embodiment of national authority, not the divine authority of the Pikuni people.

In contrast to this national imaginary, a competing series of space-time metaphors surfaces throughout the novel. After the visions of the decimation of the Pikunis and the near extinction of the black-horns given by Feather Woman, Fools Crow realizes that he "had been brought here, to the strange woman's lodge in this strange world, to see the fate of his people. And he was powerless to change it, for he knew the yellow skin spoke a truth far greater than his meager powers, than the power of all his people" (361). On the one hand, the vision appears fatalistic, as if it instantiates on a mythical level what Timothy Melley describes as the posture of "agency panic" that was pervasive among post-WWII writers in the US. This ordering of history can be read as a form of abandoning "this world" and refusing culpability for the material present. Such a mythical chronotope differs from the one offered by representatives of the nation-state, but it also reads as poignantly and resignedly dire.

On the other hand, the mythic chronotope is itself subordinate to the novel's overriding temporal and ecological scale. This ecological scale of deep time is particularly evocative during the closing scenes, when the narrator abstractedly observes that the "men talked of hunting, of moving the camps out of the valleys, of moving on" (392). The inevitability and commitment to survival of this scene turns to the familiar image of children, who are outside "play[ing] in the rain, chasing each other, slipping and skidding in the mud. They were Pikunis and they played hard" (392). The episode contrasts sharply with the earlier vision given to Fools Crow of native children standing isolated and dejected on the fringes of a schoolyard. What's more, the final episode situates youth and belonging within a vast, independent nonhuman world:

Far from the fires of the camps, out on the rain-dark prairies, in the swales and washes, on the rolling hills, the rivers of great

animals moved. Their backs were dark with rain and the rain gathered and trickled down their shaggy heads. Some grazed, some slept. Some had begun to molt. Their dark horns glistened in the rain as they stood guard over the sleeping calves. The blackhorns had returned, and, all around, it was as it should be. (392–93)

These images of immensity and cyclical action—molting bison, vast rivers of animals—stand in contrast to the General's chronotopic imagination, for time remains independent from an anthropocentric center. Also, the scene's immediate relationship to children playing in the camps mixes social realism with ecological vastness. This concluding image of an immense and "rolling" nonhuman world invokes the cosmological fact of time and space as independent of the nation-state. Indeed, the recurring references to this ecological scale throughout the novel resemble Mark McGurl's characterization of "the posthuman comedy" in which "the spatiotemporal vastness and numerousness of the nonhuman world becomes visible as a formal, representational, and finally existential problem" (537). From the perspective of the spatiotemporal vastness that recurs throughout *Fools Crow*, the narrative poses the philosophical and political problem of the nature of life and community not only beyond national spaces but also outside human finitude. Once this question of geohistorical scale is raised, though, the narration almost without exception collapses under that scale's expanse. Meaninglessness looms out of the expansiveness, and so the narrative recursively affirms the tribe or community as the only viable scale of human intelligibility.

This narrative pattern appears most clearly in the contrast between *Fools Crow* and *Fast Horse*, the Pikuni brave who most frequently violates the expectations of the tribe for the sake of self-interest and self-legislation. Expressing an increasing sense of autonomy from his people's traditions, *Fast Horse* becomes contemptuous of the Pikuni way of life. He realizes, for instance, that "he no longer believed in the Beaver Medicine [of his father] or in anything Pikuni" (189). But such unbelief—not in itself depicted negatively in Welch's work—devolves into misunderstanding that quickly displaces *Fast Horse* both culturally and spatially. Not long after *Fast Horse* leaves his community for the last time, he observes that the "village of the Lone Eaters looked small

and insignificant in the blue snowfield” (197). When faced with the seemingly infinite possibilities of a wider natural world, the scale of the community is conspicuously devalued. The scale of nature seems here to undermine the community, to reify its lack of worth as the narrative telescopes out and finds the village hardly visible. However, when Fast Horse anonymously returns the body of Yellow Kidney to the camp, he juxtaposes his youthful dreams with his adult state of autonomy: “He had spent his time [when he was younger] dozing and daydreaming, dreaming of the day when his own horses would be many, when his lodge would be filled with wives and children. He had dreamed of war honors and strong medicine, an exalted place among the Pikunis” (333). Fast Horse now recognizes that such a future “was not to be. Now he was a solitary figure in the isolation of a vast land” (333). The scale of an expansive environment cuts both ways: even as it seemingly affirms Fast Horse’s appraisal of the worthlessness of the village of Lone Eaters, this scale also displaces him within geohistorical limitlessness. If geological scale and the temporal scope of deep time expose the relative insignificance of a tribal culture, they also undermine an individual’s ability to find an intelligible scale for belonging and meaning. Fast Horse becomes little more than a solitary monad: “He was now alone, but he knew he would be welcome at the whiskey forts in the north. There were many men alone up there” (334). Having become “isolated,” Fast Horse leaves to find weak and lonely solace among other atomized and displaced selves. While the encroaching nation-state is a failed space of belonging in *Fools Crow*, the novel’s ecological scale also exhibits the autonomous individual as a wanderer in a landscape that attests to his isolated insignificance.

The chronotope of deep time and vast ecological scales drive Fast Horse to the brink of alienation, but they afford *Fools Crow* the conditions for finding an intelligible scale for collective belonging. For example, when *Fools Crow* goes in search of Fast Horse after the latter leaves the Pikuni camp, *Fools Crow* is initially surprised to find that he is “enjoying himself. He did not feel sad or lonely because Red Paint or his father or another hunter were not with him; instead, he felt the freedom of being alone, of relying upon himself” (213). His sense of freedom allows *Fools Crow* to sympathize with Fast Horse: “It was this freedom from responsibility, from accountability to the group, that was

so alluring" (213). Yet *Fools Crow* soon recognizes that the appeal of autonomy turns on a dissociative hinge:

As long as one thought of himself as part of the group, he would be responsible to and for that group. If one cut the ties, he had the freedom to roam, to think only of himself and not worry about the consequences of his actions. So it was for Owl Child and Fast Horse to roam. And so it was for the Pikunis to suffer. (213)

The ambiguous last line strikes a note of uncertainty regarding the freedom of Owl Child and Fast Horse. The US Army uses the exploits of Owl Child and his gang as fodder for their slaughter of the Pikuni. It is possible that the symmetry between Fast Horse's freedom and the Pikuni's suffering is meant to establish a causal relationship: the US Army finds in Owl Child's rebelliousness an opportunity for justifying further intervention. What's more, *Fools Crow* suggests that the freedom of Fast Horse in unlimited space and time actually displaces the self from the suffering of the community. Fast Horse cannot feel what the Pikuni experience when he is separate from the community. The affect of suffering is not infinitely scalable: local history and community pain wash out when set within geohistorical expanses. The chronotope of deep time thus recursively affirms the tribe as the only viable scale of the self's intelligibility.

The conventional spatial and temporal relationships of the bildungsroman are recast in *Fools Crow*, such that its characters are forced to acknowledge their place within nonhuman environments. This chronotopic difference signals a departure from the anthropocentric political assumptions of the 1980s. The recurring chronotope of deep time and expansiveness in *Fools Crow* not only raises questions about the political margins of national history but also situates human beings within an ecology of species and environments. For example, if *Fools Crow*'s experience with Fast Horse provides a kind of worldly wisdom about the importance of seeing one's self as "responsible to and for that group," it initially appears to be a conventional scene of a citizen's maturation after the fashion of the bildungsroman tradition (213). However, this recognition scene is situated within a decisively—even oppressively—nonhuman environment. *Fools Crow* "walked over to

the joining of the two rivers” and watches as “the silent seam filled with ice chunks and froth” (213). Fools Crow’s dalliance with untethered freedom is engulfed by the expansive forces of the joining waters: as he “looked into the ice-clogged seam of the two rivers, he felt again the weight of responsibility” (213). The “weight of responsibility” is here measured by the scale of an expansive nonhuman world. If maturity and citizenship are conventionally the culmination of a protagonist’s *bildung*, this episode in *Fools Crow* inflects such generic terms through the scale of ecological vastness. Indeed, the weight of an expansive ecological system prompts Fools Crow to return to the community, as if the nonhuman environment and its spatiotemporal immensity elicit a need for rootedness within Welch’s protagonist.

The motifs of ecological vastness and deep time in *Fools Crow* work against the conceptual grain of liberal autonomy, deregulation, and the values of private property that were at the heart of Reagan’s economic revolution. These tropes not only exhibit the contingent nature of the nation-state but also bring to Fools Crow’s mind the fact of his place within an ecology of nonhuman forces. Indeed, as Timothy Morton puts it, such a global scale often “compels us to rethink the idea of place, not in order to discard it, but to strengthen it, and to use it in a more thorough critique of the world that brought about mass hunger, monocultures, nuclear radiation, global warming, mass extinction, pollution, and other harmful ecological phenomena” (170). The vastness of ecological terrain forces Fools Crow to reconsider the concept of belonging within his community, rather than secular citizenship within the nation-state. He does not discard the tribe because of its insignificance relative to ecological vastness; rather, a community with a situated ecological place becomes the only intelligible anchor in the midst of the violence of an encroaching state and the deep time of the planet.

The convergence of genre, history, and ecological scale serves as a formal mechanism for rewriting the erasure of the Pikuni way of life, but it also affirms the ecological contours of human existence in an era when the environment and native lands were increasingly exploited for economic interests. Welch’s novel subsumes history and ethical responsibility under the arc of a nonhuman comedy—as McGurl frames it, the “representational” problem of meaning in light of “spatiotemporal vastness” (537). *Fools Crow* breaches the gulf between human and nonhuman histories and gives rise to the existential problem of human

insignificance. The novel invokes the nonhuman in order to query the secular nation-state as a space of narrative enclosure and political belonging, but this invocation is also the source of existential uncertainty. The pattern of resolution across the novel is that scenes of human smallness within spatiotemporal expansiveness set the terms not only for history but also citizenship. The individual's responsibility to a community is situated in relation to an interdependent field of ecological relations. The fact that the scales of the nonhuman world undermine anthropocentric configurations of history in turn changes how "the weight of responsibility" is measured (213). The nonhuman comedy in *Fools Crow* thus presents as woefully myopic and fundamentally alienating the Reagan administration's policies of health, safety, and environmental deregulation. Indeed, these policies become indicative of a broader abnegation of political responsibility. The environmental and energy policies of the 1980s defined citizenship within an anthropocentric, economic frame. According to these Reagan-era policies, the state ensures the conditions of competition for atomized individuals—a secular form of political thinking that envisions the nonhuman world as extraneous to citizenship. However, through Welch's engagement with the conventions of genre, his novel further shows that the nonhuman world falls outside the political calculus of not only Reagan-era conservatism but the broader tradition of liberal citizenship: ecology becomes nothing more than a field of potential property or economic resources. Welch's *Fools Crow* exhibits this sentiment as a form of historical blindness—a cultural and political narrative that excludes by its avowed mechanisms of inclusion and exploits through its purported forms of freedom.

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