Drew Lopenzina. *Through an Indian's Looking Glass: A Cultural Biography of William Apess, Pequot*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2017. 293 pp. ISBN: 9781625342591.
https://www.umass.edu/umpress/title/through-indians-looking-glass

And I can tell you that I am fully satisfied with the manner of my creation, fully—whether others are or not. — William Apess

Drew Lopenzina is Associate Professor at Old Dominion University of Early American and Native American literatures with a PhD in English from the University of New Hampshire. *Through the Looking Glass* argues that William Apess was an early nineteenth century indigenous author who exemplified the "terrible negative voice" (a Walt Whitman metaphor) that challenged the hegemony of dominant American literary discourse's celebration of settler colonialism by "directly confronting the dominant narrative structures presented in 'novels, histories, newspapers, poems, schools, [and] lectures" (1-2). Lopenzina hopes his book will make readers aware of the enormity of the injustices against indigenous peoples by rendering their "stories and claims visible once more" through a cultural biography of William Apess (2). Lopenzina's text includes numerous scholarly works and key concepts by Native American authors and critics. For instance, he uses Gerald Vizenor's term "survivance" when describing the work of Apess as well as Apess himself, whom he describes as a "dynamic figure of liminality or hybridity" (4). It can be argued that Apess's liminality and hybridity, as with his indigenous contemporaries, are the outcome of the lack of investment in record-keeping that the U.S. government demonstrated toward the people and peoples it had a vested interest in erasing. Given these constraints, Lopenzina constructs a cultural biography that "holds up Apess's life as a lens through which to view the dynamics of Native lives in the Northeast" (7). Or, as Apess poetically phrases it, "through an Indian's looking-glass darkly" (7). Feminist scholars will appreciate that this cultural biography does not fail to acknowledge the contribution of women who mentored Apess, such as his aunt Sally George and Anne Wampy (143). Finally, the author desires to discover why Apess's life and work continues to be a cultural lacuna while elucidating "Apess's place on the literary, cultural, and historical map…" (251).

One of the key concepts addressed in Lopenzina's text is "unwitnessing." Acts of unwitnessing consist of rhetorically erasing inconvenient truths such as the "persistence of Native peoples and their cultures" (3). The author cites numerous examples of canonical authors, including Tocqueville, Cooper, Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson, as unwitnessing the resilience and integrity of individuals and communities they observed firsthand. For instance, Tocqueville famously unwitnesses the persistence of Native peoples when he writes in his highly acclaimed and iconic *Democracy in America* that America's indigenous peoples are fated for "inevitable destruction" because of, in his words, their "implacable prejudices, their uncontrolled passions, their vices… and savage virtues" (qtd. 2-3; *Democracy in America*). James Fenimore Cooper not only prognosticates the inevitable demise of indigenous inhabitants but claims it has already occurred in defiance of his own proximity to his Native neighbors (53). Although Lopenzina does not cite specific examples from the works of Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson—although those do exist—he does note that America's extensive biographical archiving of their lives and works, while neglecting Apess's life, is testament to another equally insidious form of unwitnessing (9). Lopenzina also highlights that, in popular culture, unwitnessing may be observed in the bias against Natives who look like Apess: an "evangelizing, book-writing, temperance-lecturing promoter" (19). Lopenzina argues that Apess rhetorically mocks popular

colonial tropes by titling his biography *A Son of the Forest* when he was primarily raised in urban environments (20).

Lopenzina observes that it is within the discipline of history itself that one of the most egregious and damaging examples of unwitnessing may be found: namely, George Bancroft's ur-text of American history, *The History of America from Colonization to Present Times*, published in 1834. Bancroft's colonial distortion of history "decrees that prior to colonization the whole of the continent 'was an unproductive waste. Throughout its wide extent, the arts had not erected a monument. Its only inhabitants were a few scattered tribes of feeble barbarians, destitute of commerce, of political connection, and of morals'" (23). Lopenzina laments that these assertions are all too often widely repeated today. These misconceptions reoccur in texts that purport to be historically accurate because they have become a part of America's national identity and legal fiction (24). Lopenzina notes that Bancroft's own textbook contradicts itself where he "records the systematic destruction of Pequot crops" while simultaneously asserting that Native landscapes were a wasteland (24-25). Interestingly, Apess wrote an account of the War of 1812 that, if not for the project of unwitnessing, should and would be of value to historians because of "its consistently ironic tone… his account is a surprisingly modern critique of military absurdity and inefficiency" (101). The author asserts that the unwitnessing of Apess stems not only from "prolonged historical disinterest" but also from "an archival negligence that runs through the field of early Native studies" (111).

Another species of unwitnessing is the legalized fantasy that one drop of 'negro blood' negates a Native person's rights as an 'Indian' to their tribal land and treaty rights. The fallacy of this racialized construction of indigenous identity was the source of some of Apess's "most poignant rhetorical arguments" (54). This legalized fantasy also contributed to the practice of bonding out Native children which Margaret Ellen Newell terms as a project of "judicial enslavement" for "generations of Native children" that wrenched families and communities apart while subjecting children to violence, forced labor, and sexual exploitation (Newell; Lopenzina, 70). Lopenzina asks readers to compare Apess's narrative to slave narratives in order to comprehend the full magnitude of the trauma Apess experienced (72). In actuality, Apess's mother was literally a slave without the pretense of the legal legerdemain of "bonding out." Finally, Lopenzina attests that the schoolhouse on Catamount Hill has an honor roll of speakers— "Stearns, Myers, Strong, Wolcott"—but "their most famous preacher [Apess] is never counted among them" (155). This elision may also be considered an example of unwitnessing in our national landmarks.

Lopenzina's background in English is apparent in his critical review of Apess's writings. Lopenzina claims that *A Son of the Forest* is a potent example of a "negative work in which the assumptions of the dominant culture are systematically dismantled and inverted, reflected back on a predominantly white audience in harshly critical terms" (173). This scholarly background is also clear in his appraisal that *A Son of the Forest* is Apess's declaration of his humanity and demand for respect as an innovative thinker and critic (173). In addition, Lopenzina classifies and distinguishes the genre of Apess's biographical narrative as a special form of "spiritual autobiography," which "recasts John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*" from Apess's own unique cultural perspective and lived experience (63). In fact, Lopenzina argues that readers would be well-advised to consider Apess's texts in reference to other "discourses of piety" (67). Furthermore, he notes Apess's use of sophisticated forms of "rhetorical reversals" to create stories that defeat an inattentive reader's expectations—a thoroughly modern technique (65).

More broadly, Lopenzina observes that Apess's writing deliberately frustrates readers by defying conventional understandings of meaning and artless exposition (66). Apess, it may be argued, provided the exemplar of the genre of cultural biography by viewing the wrongs he was subject to as part of "larger machinations at work" (17). He sought to "bear witness" to the "complex social forces" and "powerful tide of history" that were responsible for his conditions (17). Heartbreakingly, Apess states that, ultimately, he is unable to chronicle the full "intensity of our sufferings" (21). Indeed, there are injuries for which words have not been invented.

Lopenzina's expertise in critical theory is illustrated by his particularly helpful precis of Apess's oeuvre: simply put, Apess was in conflict with history itself (234). He resisted "the semantics of colonial discourse" by rejecting the common derogatory and subjugating tropes of dominant discourse such as "savage," "barbaric," and "wild" (175). Furthermore, it is Apess's own metaphor, that of the "looking glass," that most readily describes his project of exposing the dominant discourse as one that "only magnifies the qualities white people wanted to see" (193).

Lopenzina notes the vital role of storytelling in indigenous communities, as well as including contemporary studies that present storytelling as a "path to overcoming trauma" (123). He cites the work of trauma experts who conclude that healing and well-being are products of "strong, enduring, cultural frameworks, or the ability to fully embrace a narrative" (122). In other words, storytelling is essential to cultural preservation and community restoration. Lopenzina refers specifically to the work of trauma specialist Jonathan Shay, who uses the concept of "*themis*" or "what's right" to explicate a person or community's understanding of what it means to be a good mother, father, son, daughter, or neighbor. For Shay, trauma is the "betrayal of *themis*," through a "violent and unanticipated fragmentation of what once seemed a sage and integrated worldview" (qtd. in Lopenzina, 122). Shay argues that only by a communal sharing of the traumatic experience through storytelling can that trauma be processed and overcome. However, in a colonial context, the colonizer's well-being is threatened by any appeal to an alternative *themis* whereby they are the wrongdoer, and their sense of right and wrong is thrown in disarray. Thus, the colonial "culture itself is a construction that attempts to contain traumatic knowledge through coercive hegemonic power" (132).

Native American readers will appreciate the poignant and painful anecdotes from Apess's texts that Lopenzina highlights as symptomatic of the ills that still plague our lived lives. For example, Apess's professional aspirations and personal dream of becoming an ordained reverend in order to help indigenous communities were repeatedly thwarted because of discrimination. He earned the right to be ordained through relentless study, serving as a "circuit riding" preacher, and publishing his sermons at his own expense. The first step to being ordained required the granting of an "exhorter's license." Even at this stage, though, he was strongly "opposed by certain members of the congregation… the discord arising over his candidacy nearly split the congregation" (162). Nevertheless, he persisted. And, after successfully serving as an "exhorter of the Word," he applied to be ordained by the Episcopal Methodist Church. In 1828, Apess was denied (164). He reapplied in 1829 and expected to be ordained, but was denied again (167). Although Lopenzina does not dwell on this particularly heartbreaking event in his life, I invite you to think for a moment what a profound disappointment this must have been for him. Imagine the humiliation and shame he must have felt as he ploughed those lonely miles and ministered to those isolated congregations. Imagine how his hopes must have grown when he applied a second time, along with those of his wife and children as they waited for the desired outcome. Only, it

was not to be. He was never given an explanation—only a perfunctory rejection. Apess's response to discrimination was to write his autobiography, and "Just a little over two months later, he deposited the manuscript of his autobiography, *A Son of the Forest*, with… the patent office for copyright… Refused ordination in the church, he located another bold avenue to begin to offer his message to the world" (168). Eventually Apess was ordained by a seceding group of Methodists—the Protestant Methodists—and Apess's "impossibly long road to ordination was finally complete" (187).

Apess did not rest on his laurels. He used the status and clout of an ordained minister to help the Mashpee Indians to regain control of the resources they needed for their livelihood during the Mashpee Revolt of 1833 (199). It could be argued that this was the first civil rights protest in U.S. history, because it was premised on Apess's apprehension of "how resiliency and effectiveness of a marginalized resistance to power would have to be conducted through the acquired moral authority of directed nonviolent action or civil disobedience" (198). Like Dr. Martin Luther King, Apess was arrested, and subsequently was sentenced to thirty days in prison (209). Similarly, too, "Apess used his night in jail as a means of holding up American democracy itself before his Indian's looking glass, and the reflection proved unsettling to a number of people in relatively high places" (205). Again, for Native readers, this has resonance—think 'water protectors,' for instance.

Lopenzina describes how some detractors tried to silence Apess by publishing lies about him. Among the most notable were that he was a "'colored man' rather than a Pequot… calling into dispute his ordination, and… charging that he had collected church monies for his own use" (219). These were pernicious attacks on his sense of self and identity as well as his life's work. How it must have stung a man who valued the printed and spoken to word to see his reputation so misrepresented and published abroad. Apess, in a move that no doubt surprised his libelers, sued and won in court. Instead of taking the full recompense allowed by law, however, he gave up his claim for the restoration of his good name by having them publish a full retraction of their defamations. This act, in my mind, illustrates his *themis*. Lopenzina conveys Apess's writing which claims that he did this:

> "'in order to show them that I wanted nothing but right, and not revenge, and that they might know that an Indian's character was as dearly valued by him as theirs was by them.' He concluded by wondering, 'Would they ever have thus yielded to an Indian, if they had not been compelled?…Though an Indian, I am at least a man, with all the feelings proper to humanity, and my reputation is dear to me; and I conceive it to be my duty to the children I shall leave behind me, as well as to myself, not to leave them the inheritance of a blasted name'" (220).

Thus, when representing himself, as well as when he was representing the will of the Mashpee Indians, Apess sought justice, not money.

Native readers will recognize the stark contrast between indigenous and colonial philosophies of justice. Apess and the Mashpee sought reparative justice whereas American jurisprudence is focused on compensatory justice. These are not only dissimilar, but the outcome of one often precludes the actualization of the other. In the instances cited in the text, if Apess had taken 'damages' as measured in dollars and cents, instead of having the men who libeled him retract

through publication their spurious and hateful lies, his reputation and good name would not have been recovered. He understood that no amount of money alone would restore his good name. Likewise, if the Mashpee had accepted money for the loss of the resources that provided them their livelihood, they never would be an independent self-sustaining community.

Apess's death did not relieve him of the burden of continuing being an 'Indian.' After his death it was widely reported that he died from "the demon rum" and that he "possessed the real traits of the Indian character, cunning and the disposition to never forgive an enemy" (248-249). The aspersion that Apess died of alcoholism has been so embedded in our culture that Robert Warrior's "Eulogy on William Apess" repeats it—albeit in sympathetic language. I was pleased that Lopenzina addressed this fallacy by finding the coroner's report of his death and having it evaluated by a "number of physicians who have declared it a textbook case of appendicitis" (248). In reference to the so-called "real traits" of the Indian, Apess identifies these as "forbearance, sympathy, permanence" (229).

Lopenzina's *Through an Indian's Looking Glass: A Cultural Biography of William Apess, Pequot* is a valuable and long overdue study of William Apess and the cultural context of his lived life. This book is a welcome addition to the field of Native American Studies, as well as numerous others besides. Although some of the academic jargon and arguments may be challenging, I have no hesitation recommending this book to readers in general. This is a salient and cogent reminder of the long history of indigenous struggles for justice, as well as an affirmation of indigenous values and survivance.

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