

Sabine N. Meyer, *Native Removal Writing: Narratives of Peoplehood, Politics, and Law* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2022), 306 pp.

Sabine N. Meyer's *Native Removal Writing: Narratives of Peoplehood, Politics, and Law* is a comparative, diachronic study of Indigenous North American fictional and non-fictional writing on Indian Removal, with a specific focus on the engagement of such texts with settler-colonial law. In her monograph, Meyer posits that Native Removal literature is not simply a colonial form of text but should be viewed as a distinct genre geared toward the assertion of Indigenous temporality: the endurance of Indigenous North American life across time. Centering the aesthetics of resistance within Native Removal writing, Meyer's study is a timely discussion of the generative powers and future-oriented agenda of Indigenous narratives throughout colonial history and as such makes a convincing case for the synergetic relationship between Indigenous literature and past as well as present activism, and between Indigenous past and contemporary realities and Indigenous futurisms.

Meyer's five chapters guide readers through the historical stages of Indigenous Removal and its legal aftermath, from the 1820s onwards. The first chapter, "Domestic Dependent Nations," is dedicated to both non-fictional (John Ross, Elias Boudinot, John Ridge) and fictional (John Rollins Ridge) contemporaneous reactions to federal colonial policies. Meyer's analysis in this chapter forms the basis of the overarching argument that the eloquent reasoning of Indigenous lawyers, politicians, and authors, while they could not halt or reverse colonial policies, would become a source of strength for future generations of writers and activists. The subsequent chapters turn to writings produced during the Allotment era (ch. 2) and to contemporary fiction (ch. 3-5). The latter is sub-divided into three currents of contemporary Native Removal literature, that is, novels engaging with international human rights law (ch. 3), novels centering African American and African Indigenous perspectives (ch. 4), and speculative fiction (ch. 5). Meyer's specific selection of works, from John Rollins Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854) to Blake Hausman's *Riding the Trail of Tears* (2011), is geared toward identifying different discourses of Indigenous nationhood that all engage critically with Indian Removal as a first step in the colonial process of dispossessing and legally re-defining Indigenous nations. The epilogue provides a short analysis of Gerald Vizenor's *Chair of Tears* (2012), which summarizes the results of the monograph by using Vizenor's novel as a lens through which to better understand the works discussed throughout the study. Meyer's conclusive arguments, for instance, that "[a]ll Native authors discussed in this study (re)turn to the history of Removal to respond to specific immediate political concerns and legal debates at the moment of their writing" (222), are convincing. One may, of course, question Meyer's choice to present these conclusive arguments by following the lead of innumerable authors in suggesting that in Vizenor's oeuvre, readers can find the narrative blueprints with the help of which all of Indigenous fiction might be understood.

Next to the essential first chapter, chapter 4 on "Contemporary Afro-Native Removal Literature" stands out. By including the Freedman debate, Meyer touches on the taboo topic of slaveholding Indigenous nations, such as the Cherokee and Choctaw, and powerfully demonstrates the ways in which only art—specifically fiction—could respond to the full complexity of the post-Removal discourse. In Sharon Ewell Foster's *Abraham's Well* (2006) and Zelda Lockhart's *Cold Running Creek* (2007), the Cherokee are both victims and perpetrators, and the novels' relationship to and treatment of Indigenous peoples of Afro-Indigenous ancestry highlights the complex dynamics of racism and its historical entanglement with

colonialism. As Meyer puts it, “[b]oth novels [...] present complex arguments in favor of the inextricable connection between the settler colonial geopolitics of Removal and the Native biopolitics of Black enslavement” (157), and the authors “end their respective novels by offering an alternative to the racialized discourse of nationhood” (171). Readers might be surprised at possibly finding this fourth chapter of Meyer’s study even more insightful than Meyer’s final chapter on Indigenous speculative fiction, although the book’s organization of topics suggests that the final case study should center on the most transformative works. Instead, the most recent and (seemingly) most experimental texts by Hausman and Jones discussed in chapter 5 might not necessarily be those that will essentially transform Indigenous North American fiction. Indeed, what Meyer labels the vision of an “Inclusive Future” (171) created collectively in Foster’s and Lockhart’s Afro-Indigenous novels might well be the most radical Indigenous-futurist imagining out of all the works discussed in *Native Removal Writing*.

In picking up the idea of Indigenous futurity in every one of the chapters, Meyer contributes to a highly topical and ongoing discourse. *Native Removal Writing* demonstrates how envisioning a better tomorrow is a core concern of Native Removal literature, and how the resistance to the political (and legal) status quo in the hopes of a brighter future is never futile, even if—in hindsight, for us future readers—the dark historical outcomes are depressingly clear.

Meyer’s close readings of Indigenous North American fiction are not extraordinary per se; these are, by necessity, short. Researchers specializing in the respective literature may find that some of the chapters cut short the definitions of important terms (e.g., *Indigenous Speculative Fiction* or *Indigenous Science Fiction*) or the citations of the most important secondary literature. But then, offering exhaustive close readings is not the goal of Meyer’s work. One of the greatest benefits for readers is the way Meyer is drawing their awareness to Indigenous literary participation in legal discourses. Meyer provides concise comparative readings of highly complex novels against the backdrop of even more complex historical-legal realities, making *Native Removal Writing* a rich archive of knowledge for any American studies scholar, whether specializing in Indigenous literatures or not.

What Meyer sets out to do with *Native Removal Writing*, then, the author impressively achieves. Through a careful diachronic analysis of Indigenous engagements with the law presented in clear language and through straightforward hypotheses, Meyer succeeds in demonstrating that a “going back to” Removal has not necessarily been a trauma response of the oppressed nations but might also be understood very much to the contrary. Building on the great understanding and eloquent use of federal colonial law by such Indigenous lawyers and politicians as John Ross or Elias Boudinot, subsequent generations of Indigenous authors and artists would return to the Removal era as a source of strength when the peoples’ sovereignty and nationhood were still intact and being actively defended in front of U.S. courts. As Meyer puts it, “[e]ngaging the history of Removal [...] enables Native writers to gauge the limits of settler colonial ascriptions and knowledge frameworks and to develop tribally specific, alternative modalities of living, being, and belonging, sometimes in dialogue with and at other times in opposition to settler colonial interpellations” (222). *Native Removal Writing* leaves us with the strong sense that when literary scholars do not consider the legal contexts of Indigenous literature their readings will miss a significant analytical step. With *Native Removal Literature*, Meyer is consequently working against the historical vacuum in which such Indigenous texts are often falsely read.

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