

**Susan McHugh. *Love in a Time of Slaughters: Human-Animal Stories Against Genocide and Extinction*. Penn State UP, 2019. 240 pp. ISBN: 9780271083704.**

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Susan McHugh's *Love in a Time of Slaughters* pays much-deserved attention to Native theory and recognizes Indigeneity as global in scope. She builds upon the work of several Native theorists to provide strong readings of oral traditions, novels, and films by and about Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals. In one of her critiques of settler culture, McHugh reads from non-Native novelist Lydia Millet's *Magnificence*, describing an epiphany that "extinction and genocide meet at least conceptually in the taxidermy collection" that the settler protagonist inherits (59). Within her analysis, McHugh critiques settler colonialism and demonstrates familiarity with recent scholarship in Native studies. She writes, for instance, that she "draws heavily" from the latest work of Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice (20). Most critical to McHugh's approach is Vine Deloria's "American Indian Metaphysics." In addition to critiquing settler culture, McHugh offers an informed study of Native literatures and cultures, along with a sincere interest in Native theory. Her critique is firmly grounded in "literary animal studies," which McHugh describes concisely as emerging from a critical theory approach from theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Donna Haraway.

The main aim of McHugh's *Love in a Time of Slaughters* is to develop a critical lens for literary theory in animal studies that includes a concern for Native cultures. Animal studies is an interdisciplinary field concerned with the complicated (and often conflicting) relationships that exist between human and nonhuman animals. McHugh rightly focuses on the fact that the areas of the earth that contain the most biodiversity also tend to contain the most cultural diversity (1). She explains that "animal narratives are first and foremost crafted objects, involving lives of a different order passed through human filters, and as such often say more than their authors, audiences, and zeitgeists even know, an aspect that makes them both alluring and troubling" (88). In reading the more-than-human ways that stories are constructed, she links "cultural and biological conservation" (91). McHugh's approach shows why animal studies scholarship needs Indigenous theories.

In promoting Indigenous theory, McHugh posits that Native American spiritual beliefs should be read philosophically. Building on the work of both Vine Deloria and Kim Tallbear, McHugh insightfully suggests that "reframing beliefs as ontologies enables anthropologists to represent Indigenous human-animal relationships apart from terms in which metaphor is only ever opposed to reality" (40). McHugh uses this critical insight, interpreting beliefs as ontologies, throughout her book while theorizing "Indigenous metaphysics" (8). McHugh's critique, which is strongly critical of the concept of animism, gives equal weight to European philosophies and Native ways of knowing.

My critique of McHugh's approach lies in the need to engage with more tribally-specific theories (or *metaphysics*, to use Deloria's term). McHugh credits Tallbear for extending Deloria's insight on tribal philosophies to nonhuman animals in "Why Interspecies Thinking Needs Indigenous Standpoints." In that same article, however, Tallbear points out that "both Vine Deloria, Jr. and Charles Eastman get classed as 'American Indian' intellectuals, but in fact, they were also Dakota and so they wrote 'American Indian' things out of a disproportionately Dakota cultural

background.” In McHugh’s usage, however, “Indigenous metaphysics” carries too much theoretical weight, applying to Native American nations as well as the Indigenous peoples of the Middle East and Japan without developing sufficient tribally-specific nuances to Deloria’s “American Indian metaphysics,” a strategic theoretical construct. This is not to say that McHugh fails to pay attention to tribal context. She provides poignant context, for instance, about the tribal milieu surrounding stories of the Inuit sled dog massacres. McHugh’s analyses are most grounded when in conversation with more voices from the tribes themselves. However, where this is lacking, the voices of Indigenous theorists from many nations are ready to be heard.

McHugh makes compelling and unexpected connections between texts about seemingly disparate Indigenous nations. In her cross-cultural analysis of the anime classic *Princess Mononoke* by Hayao Miyazaki and Linda Hogan’s novel *Power*, for instance, she explains that they both “address the systematic eradications of Indigenous peoples” (23). The characters in *Princess Mononoke* are based on Indigenous people of Japan, specifically the Emishi and Utari (often referred to as Ainu). Hogan’s novel is about a fictional tribe influenced by two tribes—her own Chickasaw Nation and the Seminole Nation.

McHugh connects the experiences of settler colonialism of the Utari and Hogan’s fictionalized Native American tribe. In her readings of *Princess Mononoke* and *Power*, McHugh asserts that she is “imagining Indigenous resurgence as necessarily both a social and an ecological project” (24). This broad-based lens on social justice is clarified in her analysis of the anime film when she defines the conflict as “different kinds of people alongside animals and gods as all together engaged in struggles that concern differences in class, gender, sex, race, ability, age, and species” (28). McHugh notes that a boy and an elk in Miyazaki’s film are “constantly caring for each other” as well as “sharing and enduring suffering” (32, 33). Her last insight here, on suffering, complements my own reading of early twentieth-century Salish novelist D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded*.

McHugh sheds light on the similar ways in which settler colonialism is experienced by Indigenous peoples throughout the world. Her critique rings true in terms of how Indigenous peoples of Japan faced similar experiences of colonization as other Indigenous peoples. McHugh’s analysis, however, would have been strengthened by attention to contemporary Utari voices—even Utari metaphysics—in her analysis of *Princess Mononoke*. This film was written and directed by Miyazaki Hayao, a non-Indigenous Japanese man, who portrays human and nonhuman Indigenous beings sympathetically (29). The Utari people, who were not recognized by the Japanese government until 1997, are noticeably absent in McHugh’s discussion of their representation in the celebrated animated film that has reached a global audience.

McHugh sees Indigenous stories as the antidote to the sickness caused by settler colonial structures. She recognizes how the myth of the “vanishing red man” follows structurally from settler colonial acts of genocide and extinction. In her reading of Linda Hogan’s *People of the Whale*, she explains that “the ‘last one’ trope is, after all, one of the most powerful representational strategies of erasure, all too often enlisted to naturalize genocides and other atrocities” (73). In response, McHugh describes one of Hogan’s characters “creat[ing] new ways of overcoming the pressures of assimilation, environmental racism, and other modern ills...” (85). She also derives from her analysis of Hogan’s novel on whale hunting the need to

understand how traditional narratives “align hunters, hunted, and other creatures as native to particular shores” (78). McHugh suggests that traditional stories that contain knowledge from other species help elucidate that settler colonialism exists as a structural problem, supporting genocide and extinction.

McHugh makes good use of several Native theorists in arguing that genocide and extinction are overlapping constructs. As previously mentioned, though, McHugh’s readings are most grounded where she engages more tribal voices. For instance, McHugh reads Inuit narratives of Canadian police shooting Inuit dogs, using the excuse that the dogs were not confined and were only partially domesticated. She cites the powerful testimony of Inuit elders to the House of Commons that “to diminish our numbers as Inuit, our dogs were being killed” (27). These killings were not acknowledged by the Canadian government until 2008. Notably, this recognition occurred only after the dedicated work of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission in documenting Inuit stories. McHugh dedicates several pages to the work of the Commission in her analysis of *Qimmit: a Clash of Two Truths*, a 2010 documentary that explores Canada’s colonial attempt at genocide/extinction. She clearly describes the importance of sled dogs to traditional Inuit cultures and explains that the term *inua* applies both to human Inuit people and to their canine companions. She also describes the important role that dogs play in holding the names of deceased humans for those who are yet to be born. This focus on tribal specificity grounds McHugh’s approach to Indigenous metaphysics and helps her show that the act of extinction, in killing Inuit sled dogs, is directly tied to the act of genocide toward Inuit peoples.

In her readings of stories on birds and bees, McHugh brings in an impressive swarm of Native theorists—Thomas King, Marijo Moore, Catherine Rainwater, Daniel Heath Justice, Harry Garuba, as well as allies such as Mark Rifkin, among others—to read several novels, including Louise Erdrich’s *Plague of Doves*. She reiterates that narratives by and about Indigenous humans and nonhumans disrupt those narratives that justify genocide and extinction. Interpreting Indigenous narratives from an animal studies perspective, she observes, requires an ontological shift from the reader, a shift to what I have called elsewhere a “first beings” standpoint. McHugh shows that Indigenous stories are crucial to “reweaving kinship bonds frayed by the conditions of settler colonialism” (191). I would only add that Indigenous narratives are likewise vital to those tightly-woven relationships always already existing across species.

Each Indigenous nation theorizes our relationships with the nonhumans with whom we share the land. For those interested in animal studies theory, specifically the literary turn, McHugh describes the field with clarity and authority. For current students of animal studies, McHugh introduces several Native theorists who contribute to her approach of reading animal stories in ways that acknowledge the colonial destruction of many Indigenous peoples who happen to belong to many species.

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