

**short fiction writers  
of the  
indian territory**

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In their book *America's Humor*, Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill list more than fifty nineteenth-century local color writers and the states and territories they dealt with to give "an idea of the thorough way they covered the nation."<sup>1</sup> A noticeable exception in the list is the Indian Territory. Referred to, during the Indian removal period, by such phrases as "lands west of the Mississippi," the "Western Territory," or "lands west of Arkansas," the Indian Territory was recognized by the time of the Civil War as a particular region whose limits were statutorily defined through treaties with various Indian tribes or "domestic dependent nations." Following the war, public attention was focused frequently on the Indian Territory as railroad executives and land speculators cast greedy eyes on Indian lands, bureaucrats investigated "conditions" there, members of Congress made it the object of numerous pieces of legislation and public opinion urged the opening of the Indian lands to non-Indian settlement. The territory did not escape the attention of local colorists. If, as Henry D. Shapiro suggests, one does not relegate the local color movement to the status of simply a transitional movement from romanticism to realism and admits the importance of belletristic travel sketches in the movement,<sup>2</sup> one would find that numerous examples of such local color sketches of the Indian Territory were published in America's popular magazines from 1870 to the end of the territorial period.<sup>3</sup> These works provided the American public a glimpse of the peculiar social conditions of the Indian Territory. There, ruled by tribal governments, was a region that was the meeting ground of Indians, blacks and northern and southern poor whites—a region that exhibited regional idiosyncracies

at least as unique as any that late nineteenth-century readers found appealing in fictional treatment of the South, the West, or New England.

Writers recognized the possibilities of these idiosyncracies as the subject of fiction. Unlike most regions, which were "discovered" by non-native local colorists who rendered them in fiction, the Indian Territory produced its own writers who recognized its literary possibilities. Yet not a single reference to Indian Territory writers appears in the scholarship dealing with local color writing. Given the separateness and relative isolation that went with Indian tribal status, it is not surprising that territorial writers have remained obscure to the American populace. However, the recent productivity of Indian writers and the consequent interest of scholars in Indian literature have led to some basic bibliographic work in earlier periods.<sup>4</sup> This work has revealed that dozens of territorial writers produced hundreds of literary pieces, many of which are of excellent quality and employ the literary modes of local color. Near the turn of the century, a group of native writers of the Indian Territory turned their attention to short fiction and produced a large number of stories that have their setting in the territory. An analysis of some of their representative works will show that, despite the separateness and relative isolation, these writers were surprisingly in step with literary production, particularly in local color, in the larger society.

The first writer, William Jones of the Sac and Fox tribe, was born in 1871 near present-day Stroud, Oklahoma, on the Sac-Fox Reservation. For his first nine years, he was raised by his grandmother Kitiqua, the daughter of the Fox chief Wa-shi-ho-wa, who taught him the traditions, language and customs of her Fox ancestors. At age ten, Jones was sent to school at Newton, Kansas, and later spent three years at a Friends boarding school in Wabash, Indiana. In 1889, he entered Hampton Institute at Hampton, Virginia, and later enrolled in Philips Academy at Andover, Massachusetts. In 1896, he entered Harvard, from which he received his A. B. in 1900 and his A. M. in 1901.

Jones began writing at Harvard, and in 1899 and 1900 published eight stories in the *Harvard Monthly*, some alongside the works of such fellow students as George Santayana and William Vaughn Moody. In the stories, Jones made use of both white and Native American characters, subjects and materials. Stories with Indian subjects and narrators include "Anoska Nimiwina" (1899); "In the Name of His Ancestor" (1899), a frame story that recounts an old Sac-Fox legend; and "The Heart of the Brave" (1900), a tale of war between the Sacs and Comanches.<sup>5</sup> Tied closely to legends and folk tales, these narratives have more of the characteristics of legends and less of the local flavor than his stories dealing with the cattle industry in the Indian Territory.

"Anoska Nimiwina," however, reflects Jones' deep concern for the Indian and for the decline of traditionalism among the Indians near the end of the nineteenth century. It is a frame story about the Indians

involved in what whites called the Ghost Dance or the “Messiah craze.” In his frame, Jones presents the Ghost Dance movement as an awakening of nativistic religious fervor, a dignified and natural response to long- and short-term federal policy toward the Indians. It presents white-Indian relations from the Indian’s perspective at the time of the movement’s beginning; plagued by a dismal life on the reservation, treaty violations, loss of land and disease that threatened to exterminate individuals and cultures alike, the Indian turned, Jones says, to his traditional religion. Thus the movement was a natural phenomenon brought about by a series of historical events and by the character of Native American psychology and culture. It was a unifying force, a vehicle for preserving Indian culture and an opportunity for the people to regain some of their lost dignity. The frame story gives an account of a gathering of tribal bands—Kiowas, Comanches, Caddoes, Shawnees, Delawares and Kickapoos—at a Sac village in the Indian Territory during the height of the revival. Jones probably had first or second-hand knowledge of the Ghost Dance among the Sac and Fox. In 1890, for instance, J. Y. Bryce, a Methodist circuit rider, witnessed a dance on his first visit to the reservation. During that visit, his interpreter was Henry C. Jones, William’s father.<sup>6</sup> Such meetings as Jones described were frequent among the above-named tribes in the Territory in the spring and summer of 1891 and were denounced by the missionaries as pagan.<sup>7</sup> In Jones’ story, the meeting is peaceful; old animosities and rivalries are put aside and replaced with a spirit of kinship. This sense of brotherhood is expressed by a Sac chief who addresses the assemblage before the dance. Jones’ depiction of the scene and his rendering of the chief’s speech are carefully wrought to present the Indians as calm, reverent and dignified. His portrayal of the ceremony that follows the address is equally careful; the participants are clearly religious practitioners—not savage fanatics—engaged in what Jones identifies as *Anoska Nimiwina*, or the dance of peace.

The frame story’s function is to provide a vehicle for the telling of a myth, the story of Shaskasi, a maiden who brought the spirit of peace from Gisha Munettoa to the lodges of men.<sup>8</sup> The frame, however, serves another purpose. It allows Jones to draw attention to the episode of recent Native American history, well known to his audience, though most likely not associated in their minds with the Indian Territory but with the Sioux and the events leading to the tragedy at Wounded Knee in 1890. At the time the story was published, much of the public and many of the reformers, missionaries and assimilationists believed that the Ghost Dance movement had demonstrated the tendency of many Plains Indians to revert to pagan or “savage” practices. Native Americans, however, recognized the activity as religious; in his frame story, Jones exhibits the attitudes of both the Native American and of the budding ethnologist.

In terms of Jones’ literary production, “Anoska Nimiwina” is significant in its contrast to other stories. Other than the local setting, of

which the reader gets few details, Jones employs none of the basic techniques of the local color writer. For instance, the Sac chief's words are given in formal English with no trace of dialect or verbal eccentricity, and Jones' serious, sympathetic treatment of the nativistic movement leaves no room for the mild humor or irony common in local color fiction. By contrast, the stories dealing with the cattle industry in the Indian Territory demonstrate that Jones clearly understood the techniques of local color writing and could manipulate them with skill.

These later stories include Jones' best fictional work. "A Lone Star Ranger" (1900)<sup>9</sup> is set in the Red River country of the Chickasaw Nation, but the remaining stories are set in the range country of the Sac and Fox, Kickapoo and Potawatomi lands between the Canadian and Cimarron rivers and west to the old Chisholm Trail.<sup>10</sup> A series of stories—"An Episode of the Spring Round-up" (1899), "Chiky" (1899), and "The Usurper of the Range" (1900)<sup>11</sup>—share a common narrator, a horse-rustler (not a thief, but a wrangler) for the Turkey Track Ranch.

Jones strives for realism through local color elements. Peopling Jones' stories are the range hands and foremen who worked the herds belonging to white men who, during the decades preceding the opening of "surplus" Indian lands to non-Indian settlement, leased huge tracts of grazing lands from tribal leaders. One ranch carved out of the grasslands of the Sac and Fox Reservation was the Turkey Track, owned in 1889 by Arthur Hill, James Jerome and Leslie Combs.<sup>12</sup> In "An Episode of the Spring Round-up," Jones pinpoints the setting near "Johnson's store, where the Lone Star Trail [probably the Chisholm Trail] crosses the Canadian River." His realism extends to the speech of his characters as he recreates the dialect of the cowboys, mainly Southern poor whites, who have come west to seek their fortunes. The values of the cowboys and their traditions at the spring round-up become the subject of the story, which tells of the gambling, horse racing, bravado and senseless violence that accompanied the gathering of the ranch hands. The loss of a horse race results in a loss of face, which leads to a gunfight in which both men are killed. Despite that, the story now and then contains a touch of sardonic humor. It ends with one cowboy's epitaph, reminiscent of John Oakhurst's in Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat":

jiM King  
 CEVN uP punCHER goD  
 nose wen oR wHar Hee waZ  
 Born jiM Ran ginst Hes joKR  
 FuLin withH WimiN AN raCe  
 Hoses.

The hard life of the western frontier and the subsequent personal tragedies are depicted in perhaps Jones' best story "Lydie" (1899).<sup>13</sup> The first-person narrative by Lydie's younger brother tells how they

were orphaned in eastern Tennessee and sent to live with an uncle on a ranch in Indian Territory and how they were raised on the ranch and came to love it. The story portrays the starkness of the cattle country's terrain as the children look around at those "God-forsaken dry weather kriks with nothin' but cottonwoods and willers stickin' up 'long 'em." Life in the Territory is austere for the children, whose only entertainment is a day-long trip, now and then, in the back of a wagon to Johnson's store. As the narrator points out, the social life on the range was nearly non-existent — no Sunday school, no picnics, not even other children to play with. After their initial impression of the bleakness of life out west, the children make pleasant discoveries about the people they meet. The Indians, different from the whites in the eyes of the children, are friendly. The children come to love cowboys: "But the punchers wuz gooder 'an the Injuns, 'cause soon as Lydie an' me could ride, they kinder like to 'ave us with 'em riding the range. An' such fun it wuz too, gallopin' with the boys when they wuz runnin' a turkey down, an', jest for fun, chasin' a coyote an' ropin' 'im." After the children have become assimilated into ranch life, Lydie is sent east to school while the boy remains on the ranch. She reluctantly but dutifully leaves the ranch and goes to Boston where she is trained as a teacher. She is sent back to the Indian Territory to teach at an Indian school near the ranch, but on her return trip she is caught in a blizzard on the prairie and dies.

In a manner typical of many color narratives, the beauty and freedom of the West contrast with the harsh realities of man's condition. Jones depicts both the grandeur of nature and its fury as he describes Lydie's ride into the blizzard. He also realistically shows the customs and foibles of the cowboys who try to outdo one another's haberdashery in order to impress the returning girl. Despite the light moments, the story of the sudden rise of the "blue norther" and Lydie's death might have led a less skilled writer into sentimentality. But Jones avoids it through strict narrative control. The narrator chattily recites his monologue to an unidentified listener in the language of the unschooled cowboy. Jones recreates the range-hand dialect with his orthography (*bimeby* for *by and by*, *sorter* for *sort of*, *out yar* for *out here*); his preservation of the narrator's solecisms; and the inclusion of cowboy expressions ("as lonesome as a calf in a corral, yellin' for its mother"). At the end, the narrator says, "Well, as Lydie had wished it, an' as the Bar-X-Bar boys wud have it, we put her away in a six by three on the butte lookin' down on the salt grounds. Thar wuz no fuss and no frills, no readin' and no singin'. We just wrapped her in blankets an' in a tarpaulin, and buried our Lydie, our little woman, like a cow-boy." The impact of the story grows out of the straight-forward quality of the narrative, with its simple language and matter-of-fact tone. It avoids sentimentality and ultimately focuses the reader's attention, not on Lydie and her death, but on the narrator and his reaction to it.

When Jones left Harvard with his A. M. degree in 1901, he turned his interest in writing from fiction to ethnology. He went on to earn a Ph.D. and became a well-known ethnologist, publishing books and articles on the Mesquakie (Fox) and other Algonquian languages, collections of tales from the Fox, Kickapoo and Ojibwa cultures, and ethnological studies of various Native American groups.<sup>14</sup> In 1906, he accepted an assignment from the Field Columbian Museum in Chicago to study the native tribes of the Philippines. Jones remained there for three years, living among the native peoples of Luzon. On March 28, 1909, he was speared to death by members of the Ilongot tribe, whom he was studying.<sup>15</sup>

A second writer was Alexander Lawrence Posey, a Creek born near Eufaula, Creek Nation, on August 3, 1873. He was the son of Lewis H. Posey, of Creek-Scotch descent, and Nancy Phillips, the full-blood daughter of Pohos Harjo of the Wind Clan. As a child Posey preferred to speak Muskogee but was forced to speak English at adolescence because he attended the Creek public school, taught in English, at Eufaula. After public school he entered the Indian University (later Bacone College) at Muskogee, from which he graduated in 1895. That same year, he was elected to the House of Warriors, the lower house of the Creek National Council, and in 1896 was appointed Superintendent of the Creek National Orphan Asylum at Okmulgee. In 1897 he became Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Creek Nation, but he soon left that office for a career in writing. Posey had begun writing while he was a student at the Indian University. He first gained public attention in 1893 with the publication of an oration titled "Sequoyah." He began to publish his lyrical poetry in local newspapers and in *The B.I.U. Instructor*, published at the University.<sup>16</sup> Between his graduation and the end of 1900, Posey published over twenty poems in local newspapers and magazines.<sup>17</sup> In 1900, he also published three short stories under the name Chinnubbie Harjo.

These stories—"Uncle Dick's Sow," "Mose and Richard," and "Jes 'Bout a Mid'lin', Sah"<sup>18</sup>—are set against the historical backdrop of the Creek Nation at the turn of the century. They deal with the blacks who represented between twenty-five and thirty percent of the Creek population. These former slaves or descendants of slaves of the Creeks had been freedman citizens of the Creek Nation since 1866 and, like the Creeks, faced with uncertainty the dissolution of the tribal land title in the waning years of the century. The Dawes Commission had been in the Indian Territory since 1893, attempting to dissolve, through negotiation, tribal title to the lands of the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles and Creeks. The tribes had resisted negotiation so well that Congress found it necessary, in 1898, to pass the Curtis Act, which effectively provided for dismantling the tribal governments, thereby forcing the tribes to negotiate and accept allotment of lands in severalty. Meanwhile, whites had moved into the Indian nations in great numbers. Some had married Indians, others were

simply squatters or opportunists, and many from both groups seemed intent on maneuvering for political position to take control when the Territory became a state.<sup>19</sup>

The reader is constantly aware of Posey's use of the idiosyncracies of locale and historical circumstances. His stories concern the blacks who lived on Coon Creek, a tributary of the North Canadian River in the Creek Nation. Like Uncle Remus and Charles Chesnutt's Uncle Julius, Uncle Dick appears as the central figure in two stories. One is about his confronting his cousin and neighbor Will, who bruises the nose of Dick's unruly sow, which Will finds rooting up his sweet potato patch. The other story is about Uncle Dick's failure to impress the need for education upon his two sons, Mose and Richard. The events in the stories might have occurred anywhere in former slave states, if not for the sense of locale. The sow, for instance, had a particular dislike for "sofky" dogs, and once, when frightened, ran through the timber "and broke up enough dry limbs to tickle a Eufaula wood peddler." These descriptions are extremely localized. Eufaula was one of the larger towns in the Creek Nation, and "sofky" was the Creek name for a staple hominy dish of the Creeks and freedmen. But, according to Posey's note, the white man had "corrupted" the term to refer to a cur, or a dog of no account. During the confrontation over the sow, Uncle Dick fires over Will's head with Will's own musket, which had not been fired since before the Civil War, when Will had loaded it and hung it over his door. A loaded musket over the door of a slave cabin, while unheard of in the South, was common in the Creek Nation, where many slaves were allowed to own weapons.

A sense of locale is also clear in "Mose and Richard." Uncle Dick sends his sons Mose and Richard to school and wants them to take advantage of an opportunity he did not have as a youth. But they make no progress in school and for three weeks hide from him the fact that they spend their time daydreaming or playing and fighting with the other pupils. When Uncle Dick finds the truth, he sends them back to the cotton field. In urging the youths to learn, he says, "I want you to larn somet'ing, kaze de time done get heah w'en if you grows up igit, de white man an' Mistah Injin gwine to get de best ob you; an' dey may git de best ob you anyhow, but hit aint gwine hu't you to go to school." And later he says, "De fus' t'ing you know you gwine grow up, an' if you caint hol'up yo' end wid de white man an' Mistah Injin, hit gwine be yo' own fault, kaze I sen' you bof to school an' gin you good advice." These statements reflect the racial priorities in the Creek Nation. While the white man might have been gaining economic ground there, the Indian was the former master of the black and still held political authority; thus he carried the title of "Mistah."

These passages also reflect an important point not only about this story but about "Jes 'Bout a Mid'lin', Sah": beneath the humor of the stories is a sociological theme. It is not the overt propaganda of Charles Chesnutt's stories but is rather akin to the subtle ideas of racial

competition or one-upmanship that underpin much of Joel Chandler Harris' work. In the last named story, Jim Quobner (Quabner, an actual Creek freedman family name) goes to a white man to ask for a middling of pork. Times are hard, and the man is willing to fulfill the request, but he sees a chance to buy votes with it for his favorite candidate in an approaching election of the Creek chief. He asks Jim if he controls any votes. "'Yasser,' Jim replied, and pressing his thumb on the horn of his saddle added, 'got dem Coon Creek niggers right hear!'" Jim promises to deliver the black vote from the Coon Creek settlement and leaves with the meat, but the favorite candidate loses by a large majority. This is a simple story on the surface, but beneath it is the complexity of racial relations in the Creek Nation. To be elected chief, the Creek often needed the support of the white man, whose economic success, because he was in a minority, was determined by the favor of the Creek politicians. But often, too, the freedmen held the swing vote. Here is racial interdependence on a public level, quite similar to that personal dependence in George Washington Cable's stories such as "Posson Jone'." Jim uses the situation to get what he wants from the white man, who is already in Jim's debt. During the exchange of small talk before Jim asks for the meat, he subtly reminds the white man that he had helped him across the river with a herd that the man had bought from Jim's cousin Shapah (Sharper, another Creek freedman family name). But the man ignores the favor he owes and asks another. Although he does not really expect to get most of the black votes for his candidate, he does feel that he has bought Jim's. But later Jim says about the election, "I jus tell yo', sah, dem Coon Creek niggers went an' turn right roun' on me!" The reader realizes that Jim had no power to deliver the votes and probably voted with the other blacks in favor of the winning candidate. In the game of one-upmanship, he had beaten the white man.

Here, as in the other stories, Posey maintains his fidelity to locale. The white man asks Jim for the news, and Jim tells about Hagie, a Creek, who was hit on the head with a ball stick at "a ball play" on the preceding Sunday. Jim says, "Dat ol' medicine man, Ledifka, been blowin' physic for 'im eber since. But I t'ink he get well dough. Dem little knot head Injin kin go tru mos' eny kiner scrape an' hoop again."

In all three stories, Posey capitalizes upon the literary resources that he found in the dialects of the Creek Nation. Most of the Creek blacks were bilingual in English and the Muskogee or Hitchiti dialect. The English dialect of the fullbloods who learned English also influenced the black dialect. In 1906, an "old settler" in the Creek Nation noted the variation in the black dialect there:

Take out along the Salt creek, west of Okmulgee, where the negroes haved lived in close proximity to the Indians, they speak a lingo that is almost undistinguishable. It's a sort of pigeon [sic] Indian and the talk is fast. The negroes in the Pecan creek settlement have another brand of language, while the 'black and

tans' along Snake creek speak an entirely different line of language. Negro dialect writers could get their money's worth by butting about in the land of the Creeks.<sup>20</sup>

In 1908 ethnologist Frank G. Speck said of the Creek blacks: "Many of them, indeed, speak English poorly and with an Indian accent and idiom. This of course is naturally true of those of mixed Indian and Negro blood."<sup>21</sup>

Posey was sensitive to the linguistic subtleties of the Creek Nation, and his stories demonstrate how finely he had tuned his ear to the dialects he heard. A peculiar use of the past participle, among other forms, for instance, distinguishes the dialect of his blacks from that of the North Carolina blacks in Chesnut's *The Conjure Woman* (1899) or the Georgia plantation dialect of Harris' Uncle Remus stories. After Will has been shot at, he runs to the cabin of Aunt Judy, who asks him, "An' whar yo' been lef' yo' hat. . . ." and "whut been git at chew?" Aunt Cook knows that Mose and Richard are not doing well in school, and she tells Uncle Dick, "Sence you sen' dem boys to school dey git plum wuffless. Den de teachah been tell me Richard look too much off'n 'is book." And Jim Quobner says, "I been ax de Lawd fer rain but peer lak He a'nt heah me," and he turns down an invitation to get down from his horse by saying, ". . . I been lef' de chillun hoein' by day se'f an' I bleege to get back. . . . I t'ought I jes ride to see how yo' been git long since de time I he'p yo' ober de ribber wid dem cow what yo' been buy f'om cousin Shapah." The reader notices, too, the substitution of the singular for the plural ("wid dem cow" and "Dem little knot head Injin"), typical of the dialect of the full-blood as presented in other works by Posey.

After 1900, Posey turned from black dialect and worked extensively in the dialect of the full blood who had learned English. He also turned from the short story and directed his talent for fiction writing toward the production of the humorous Fus Fixico letters. Fus Fixico, Posey's full-blood persona, was an observer who reported, through letters, to local and regional newspapers and magazines concerning events in the Indian Territory. Eighty-one printings of letters have been noted to date.<sup>22</sup> Many letters were reports of the monologues of Hotgun, another full blood, or conversations between Hotgun and his younger friends Wolf Warrior, Kono Harjo and Tookpafka Micco. Much of Hotgun's commentary was about political events or the actions of bureaucrats, and he delighted in corrupting their names into bad puns, a favorite technique which Posey probably picked up from the professional humorists of the last few decades of the nineteenth century.

While Posey produced this social criticism, he worked as a journalist. For two years, he edited the Eufaula *Indian Journal* and then lived at Muskogee, where he worked for the *Muskogee Times* and briefly assisted the Dawes Commission in enrolling full-blood Creeks for allotments. Posey drowned in the North Canadian River on May 27, 1908.

One of the most prolific writers among Jones' and Posey's contemporaries in the Indian Territory was John Milton Oskison, a mixed-blood Cherokee, born at Vinita, Cherokee Nation, on September 1, 1874. Oskison attended Willie Halsell College at Vinita, where he was a classmate of his lifelong friend Will Rogers. He then entered Stanford University, which awarded him a B. A. degree in 1899. He later did graduate work at Harvard. While a student at Stanford, Oskison began a long career as a writer and journalist. Much of his early effort was turned to short story writing, and during the decade following 1897, he published at least ten stories, most of them in periodicals with national circulation.<sup>23</sup>

Like Jones and Posey, Oskison chose the twilight years of the Territory as the historical backdrop for most of his stories. Although he set stories in various parts of the Indian Territory, his favorite geographical setting was the northeastern part of the Cherokee Nation, particularly Vinita, the rolling prairies to the west of the town, and the rugged, timbered hills to the east and south. Oskison's fiction was a response to the historic changes that were occurring in his native land. Since the Civil War, the Cherokee Nation had been beset by internal factionalism and external pressure from railroad companies, bureaucrats, politicians and others with vested interests in dissolving the tribal government and opening the territory to non-Indians. Although the Cherokees resisted, the non-Indians came anyway. The Cherokee Nation was overrun by intruders, mainly whites, who came to the Indian Territory to make their fortunes, take up "free" land or hide from the law. Federal law and bureaucratic sloth made it practically impossible for the Indians to have such people removed. Violence was common because the Indians had no jurisdiction over the intruders. With the appointment of the Dawes Commission in 1893, Congress took the first step toward taking the decision regarding tribal status out of the Indians' hands. As it became apparent that the tribal title ultimately would be dissolved and the lands would be allotted in severalty, the Indians reacted variously. Some prepared themselves for inevitable American citizenship, while others, like the Cherokee full bloods, resisted by refusing to enroll for allotments or to accept allotment certificates or by attempting to emigrate to Mexico.<sup>24</sup> Oskison had observed all of the types of participants in these historic events. Most of the social, economic and racial classes of the region are represented in his work. There one finds the full-blood and the mixed-blood Indians and the white "do-gooders," adventurers, cowboys, desperadoes and true friends of the Indians.

"Tookh Steh's Mistake" (1897), for example, is the story of a full blood who cannot adapt to social changes that will come with the imminent dissolution of the tribal government; he decides, like many of his historical counterparts did, to emigrate to Mexico but, ill-equipped to make such a trip, starves to death en route. On the other hand, "The Problem of Old Harjo" (1907) is about a Creek full blood

who adjusts to social change and wants to join the church but is refused because he has two wives. The main character in "When the Grass Grew Long" (1901) is Billy Wilson, a lower-class white cowboy who has come to the Territory to make his fortune; he is saved from a prairie fire by the full-blood Jinnie Jake, who perishes with her father when the fire destroys their homestead. "The Schoolmaster's Dissipation" (1897) is about a white school teacher who anticipates his post in the Territory with an altruistic missionary enthusiasm, but soon finds himself in a grubby, mundane and unheroic position, becomes addicted to morphine, and is cured by a woman doctor who is in the Territory to study diseases of Indian children. "The Quality of Mercy" (1904) is about Venita Churchfield, a young mixed-blood Cherokee who returns to the Territory from finishing school and convinces a local white editor to stop using his columns to try the case of a young man who, unknown to her, has committed a robbery to obtain money with which he hopes to impress her.

Oskison knew these types of people, and he carefully recorded their language. Abbreviated statements, mixtures of English and Cherokee, the expletive "maybe so" and the use of appositives after pronouns are common in the English dialect of the full bloods. For instance, Tookh Steh says, "We no more hunt deer, no shoot turkey. Land all gone. I go to Mexico where Great Father no take my land. I tell you, good-bye." And when Billy Wilson ropes an errant calf for Jinnie Jake, she says, "Much welcome. Awful nice rope. Bad little *oyah*." When she carries Billy from the fire, she says to herself, "Maybe so, save him, little fellow!"<sup>25</sup> No peculiarities of dialect mark the speech of the educated Venita Churchfield or the editor. But the dialect of the uneducated cowboy is carefully represented in "When the Grass Grew Long," "Only the Master Shall Praise," and "The Fall of King Chris" (1903).

In 1898 Oskison was awarded *Century Magazine's* prize for college graduates for "Only the Master Shall Praise," which clearly demonstrates his achievement of verisimilitude in such matters as topography, manners, occupations and dialect. Set near Vinita in the late 1880s, the story concerns the relationship between Hanner the Runt and Bill Seymour. Hanner is a half-blood Cherokee cowboy, physically deformed, dressed in old clothes, floppy hat and mismatched spurs, and mounted on a "knotty and scrubby" pony named Pignuts, after a species of scrubby timber that grew in the region. In Sancho Panza fashion, he is the constant companion of Seymour, a handsome, hard-drinking white ranch hand, who rides a fine horse and dresses in the latest cowboy fashions. Oskison adds to the contrast by allowing Hanner to misuse more pronouns, drop more word endings and double more negatives than Seymour. Hanner says, for instance, "Bill, ye ain't a-goin' to git drunk to-day, are ye? They say they's goin' to be a lot of extra marshals 'at ain't lettin' any drunk walk the streets to-day."

And Bill replies, "Oh, go to the devil, you old woman! Who said I was goin' to get drunk? Somethin' I never do. Come on; let's ride up."

Unfriended, Hanner is utterly loyal to Seymour, who has cruelly mistreated him at times—in fact, it was Seymour who caused Hanner to have the "caved in" ribs—but who finds it "convenient" to have Hanner wait on him. Together they attend the Fourth of July celebration at Vinita, where Hanner rides a wild mule to demonstrate his bravery to Seymour, who despite his promise, gets drunk. Hanner, afraid that his idol will be arrested, entices him away from the celebration by pretending to be ill. When Seymour learns the truth, he feels deprived of his fun. In his drunken state, he decides to rob the mail stage as a joke, despite Hanner's appeals to the contrary, disguising himself in Hanner's floppy hat and bandana. The joke goes wrong, and a guard is killed. They go into hiding, but Hanner decides to save his friend by explaining to the posse that the robbery was intended as a joke. Because of his hat, they mistake him for the killer, and he decides to remain silent. He is hanged, sacrificing himself for his friend. The reader is prepared for the act by Oskison's gently probing the psychology of the attachment to and loyalty of the weak for the strong. Too, Hanner has proved his courage by riding the wild mule. A final, ironic twist comes at the end; when Seymour is told of Hanner's fate, he looks the teller full in the face and says, "The poor little fool, to do a thing like that!"

Even Oskison's early writing shows a surprising maturity, and there is much in his work to suggest his closeness to literary models. The idyllic flavor of some stories is reminiscent of Bret Harte's work. Hanner's loyalty, too, is as deep and lasting as Tennessee's Partner's, and the reader is struck by the similarity of Oskison's plot to Harte's. "The Schoolmaster's Dissipation" is also reminiscent of Harte's "The Idyll of Red Gulch" (1879), in which Mary the teacher cures Sandy of his drinking, and he trades the addiction to alcohol for an addiction to love for her. In Oskison's story it is the teacher who is saved and who trades his addiction to morphine for addiction to love for Dr. Pless. Oskison, like Harte, also had a penchant for physically grotesque characters. Hanner had one shoulder "knocked down a quarter of a foot lower than the other," two caved in ribs, and a scar on his face. Billy Wilson had a dislocated hip and walked with a side-swing of one leg. Finally, names like Runt, Convict, Smear and JIC-Bert remind the reader of the nameless people, such as Tennessee's Partner and the Duchess, who populate Harte's West. These parallels suggest, if not close reading of Harte, a mutual recognition of the possibilities for plots and characters in the raw western setting.

There is evidence to suggest that Oskison was also attuned to the spirit of short fiction of the 1890s. His works contain sociological themes, usually less blatantly stated than those in Garland's stories such as "Up the Coulé" (1891) and often less subtly than those in Crane's stories such as "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (1898). The

poverty and poor health conditions of the Cherokees are apparent in "The Schoolmaster's Dissipation" as is the plight of the conservative full bloods in "Tookh Steh's Mistake," "When the Grass Grew Long" and "The Problem of Old Harjo." The rough and rowdy demeanor of the cowboys, their willingness to fight and their cruel jokes reflect the violence that was inherent in and often erupted without warning in western society. But their genuine sense of humor and their enjoyment of such pastimes as the rodeo are reflected in stories such as "The Fall of King Chris." The themes are not editorial but are made an integral part of the setting, character or plot of the stories. In "Only the Master Shall Praise," for instance, Hanner's mixed blood is central to the story's fabric. Oskison uses the pejorative term "half-breed" to describe the misshapen cowboy. From his Indian mother, Hanner gets an "innocent trust" in humanity that causes him to remain loyal to Seymour and a stoicism that allows him to face death in silence. From his white father, he inherits a "physical energy and mental weakness" that constantly gets him into trouble and makes him a social outcast. With his blood polluted, the Indian has cast his lot with the white man, who dominates him. The "half-breed" misfit is ultimately sacrificed, and the white man gets off free.

Oskison gained a national reputation as a writer and journalist. He did editorial work for the New York *Evening Post* and was for several years a special writer for *Collier's*. He continued to write stories and published three novels using Indian Territory and Oklahoma settings—*Wild Harvest* (1925), *Black Jack Davy* (1926) and *Brothers Three* (1933)—as well as biographies of Sam Houston (1929) and Tecumseh (1938). Oskison died in New York in 1947.<sup>26</sup>

Oskison, Posey and Jones were the writers of the Indian Territory who made the most prolific use of local materials. However, there were others who used such materials. Among them was DeWitt Clinton Duncan (1829-1909), a Dartmouth-educated Cherokee. Under the name of Too-qua-stee, he was known to Indian Territory readers primarily as a political essayist. His Too-qua-stee letters were as widely published and were perhaps more numerous than Posey's Fus Fixico letters. Duncan's story "Magnificent Tom; or a Brave Girl's Fate" (1899) is set in southwestern Texas. Ora V. Eddleman Reed (born 1878), of Cherokee descent, in 1899 and 1900 edited *The Twin Territories*, a literary magazine at Muskogee. She published in it a number of her own short stories, some of which, such as "Lizonka, a Creek Girl" (1899), made extensive use of local materials. Somewhat later, a Wyandot writer Bertand N. O. Walker (1870-1927), who wrote under the name of Hen-toh, began to publish stories, including "Tah-seh-tih's Sacrifice" (1907). But his best fiction was published as *Tales of the Bark Lodges* in 1919; told in the English dialect of a full-blood Wyandot, the tales might well be considered the Wyandot counterpart of the Uncle Remus stories.<sup>27</sup>

This survey of short fiction writing in the Indian Territory serves

two purposes; it demonstrates the existence of extensive literary activity in the genre among the native populations there and suggests the extent to which they were attuned to previous and on-going literary trends in the larger society, particularly the use of local color in short fiction. They strove for realism in depicting the local settings, the types of people who inhabited them, and their occupations, manners and dialect. They gently probed the psychology of these western folk, and the stories often take a novel turn with weak, grotesque or simple characters rising to heroic acts or, in the mode of Harte's John Oakhurst or Mother Shipton, self-sacrifice. And in most stories, there is an element of humor that results from incongruity or a manipulation of dialect. Territorial writers used these literary techniques and devices with a skill that gave their works a doubtless literary merit. In their adherence to local color techniques, they frequently tied their stories to specific historical events and places in the Indian Territory. Vinita is Vinita. Unlike Stowe's Oldtown, Maine, or Harte's Poker Flat or Red Gulch, California, Vinita is not Anytown, Indian Territory. The tendency toward historical accuracy may reflect a local audience envisioned by some writers, but even Oskison, who early on wrote for a national audience, displayed the tendency.

It no doubt aimed at verisimilitude, but it suggests something more. These writers produced their works at a time when the public image of the Indian Territory was at perhaps its lowest point. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, especially during the 1890s, the popular magazines published unflattering descriptions of the Indian Territory as a place where whiskey flowed freely, lawlessness and violence were the rule, tribal officials were incapable of ruling and enriched themselves with tribal funds and white inhabitants (though there illegally) were virtually without protection of the law.<sup>28</sup> This image was reinforced by public statements and reports of federal officials and bureaucrats such as the members of the Dawes Commission who were urging the Indians to give up their tribal status. If not in concert with the land speculators and others who, for selfish reasons, wanted the Indian Territory opened, these writers and officials contributed to the cause, for their reports added credence to congressional attempts to dissolve the Indian Territory for the "good" of the population there. The stories written by the territorial writers do depict violent acts, but the acts are not committed, interestingly enough, by Indians. The rule is amicable relations. While racism and racial tensions abound in the United States, racial relations are delicately balanced in the tri-racial society of the Indian Territory. The Indian characters possess a native intelligence and shrewdness, which, though equipping them well for the aboriginal state, fails them in the face of the white man's ruthlessness, technology and superior knowledge of the legal system under which the Indian is brought. Taken as a whole, the stories may be viewed as a corrective to the popular image of the Indian Territory. At the least, they reflect the poignancy with which

these Native American writers viewed the dissolution of their tribal status.

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## notes

1. (New York, 1978), 264-65; Willard Thorpe also says that "every region" had been heard from within a decade following the Civil War. See *American Humorists* (Minneapolis, 1964), 26.

2. Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind* (Chapel Hill, 1978), 7-11.

3. See, e. g., Milton W. Reynolds, "The Indian Territory," *Western Monthly*, 4 (November, 1870), 260-266; Elias Cornelius Boudinot, "The Indian Territory and Its Inhabitants," *Geographical Magazine*, 1 (June, 1874), 92-95; Theodora R. Jenness, "Indian Territory," *Atlantic Monthly*, 43 (April, 1879), 444-452; Henry King, "The Indian Country," *Century Magazine*, 30 (August, 1885), 599-606; Anna Laurens Dawes, "An Unknown Nation," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 76 (March, 1888), 598-605; Rezin W. McAdam, "An Indian Commonwealth," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 87 (November, 1893), 884-897; Allen Hendricks, "The Land of the Five Tribes," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, 58 (November, 1896), 670-676.

4. Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., and James W. Parins, *A Biobibliography of Native American Writers, 1772-1924* (Metuchen, New Jersey, 1981).

5. *Harvard Monthly*, 28 (May 1899), 102-111 [also published in *Southern Workman*, 28 (August, 1899), 298-303]; 29 (December, 1899), 109-115; and 30 (May, 1900), 99-106, respectively.

6. J. Y. Bryce, "Some Experiences in the Sac and Fox Reservation," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 4 (December, 1926), 309.

7. See, e. g., letters of George Washington Hicks, a Cherokee missionary to the Wichitas and Caddoes, in *The Indian Missionary*, 7 (February, 1891), 1; (March, 1891), 2; (July, 1891), 2; and (August, 1891), supplement.

8. According to Jones' note (105), the version of the myth related in the story, which was brought to the Sac and Fox by the Potawatomes, had probably not previously appeared in print.

9. *Harvard Monthly*, 30 (June, 1900), 154-161.

10. The Chisholm Trail entered the Indian Territory near present-day Fletcher, Oklahoma, and ran north to present-day Kingfisher, Hennessey and Enid and to Caldwell, Kansas.

11. *Harvard Monthly*, 28 (April, 1899), 46-53; 29 (November, 1899), 59-65; and 30 (March, 1900), 13-22, respectively.

12. B. B. Chapman, "Guthrie, From Public Land to Private Property," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 33 (Spring, 1955), 71. For other instances of such leasing, see Donald J. Berthrong, "Cattlemen on the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation, 1883-1885," *Arizona and the West*, 13 (Spring, 1971), 5-32; William T. Hagan, "Kiowas, Comanches, and Cattlemen, 1867-1906: A Case Study of the Failure of U. S. Reservation Policy," *Pacific Historical Review*, 40 (August, 1971), 333-355; and William T. Savage, Jr., *The Cherokee Strip Livestock Association: Federal Regulation and the Cattleman's Last Frontier* (Columbia, Missouri, 1973).

13. *Harvard Monthly*, 28 (July, 1899), 194-201.

14. A list of Jones' work appears in Littlefield and Parins, *A Biobibliography of Native American Writers, 1772-1924*, 82-83.

15. A biographical sketch of Jones appears in Franz Boaz, "[William Jones]," *American Anthropologist*, 11 (January, 1909), 137-139.

16. "Sequoyah," *Cherokee Advocate*, July 22, 1893, reprinted in *The Red Man*, 12 (July-August, 1893), 8. The lyrical poems of Posey's college years include "Spring," "The Picnic's Comming [sic]," and "The Whippowill Has Come," *Indian Journal*, March 29, May 11, and May 25, 1894. We have seen only one copy of *The B. I. U. Instructor*, but an account of Posey's writing for it appears in William Elsey Connelley's "Memoir" of Posey in Minnie H. Posey, comp., *The Poems of Alexander Lawrence Posey* (Topeka, 1910), 19-20.

17. For a list of Posey's works, see Littlefield and Parins, *A Biobibliography of Native American Writers, 1772-1924*, 135-136.

18. *Twin Territories*, 2 (January, 1900), 32-33; 2 (April 1900), 76-77; 2 (November, 1900), 226-228.

19. The best comprehensive account of the demise of the Creek Nation as a political entity is Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1941); her account of the factionalism, fraud, corruption, political maneuvering and open injustice that accompanied the dissolution of the tribal title and allotment of lands in severalty appears in *And Still the Waters Run* (Princeton, 1972).

20. *Muskogee Democrat*, February 6, 1906.

21. Frank G. Speck, "The Negroes and the Creek Nation," *Southern Workman*, 37 (February, 1908), 108.
22. See Littlefield and Parins, *A Biobibliography of Native American Writers, 1772-1924*, 37-39.
23. These included "I Match You: You Match Me," *Indian Chieftain*, May 27, 1897, reprinted from the Stanford *Sequoia*; "Tookh Steh's Mistake," *Indian Chieftain*, July 22, 1897; "A Schoolmaster's Dissipation," *Indian Chieftain*, December 23, 1897; "Only the Master Shall Praise," *Century Magazine*, 59 (January, 1900), 327-35; "When the Grass Grew Long," *Century Magazine*, 62 (June, 1901), 247-250; "To Younger's Bend," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 56 (June, 1903), 182-188; "Working for Fame," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 56 (August, 1903), 372-378; "The Fall of King Chris," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 56 (October, 1903), 587-593; "The Quality of Mercy: A Story of the Indian Territory," *Century Magazine*, 68 (June, 1904), 178-181; "The Problem of Old Harjo," *Southern Workman*, 36 (April, 1907), 235-241.
24. A survey of political events during this period of Cherokee history appears in Morris L. Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, 1838-1907* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1938).
25. It is interesting to note that Alexander Posey uses the latter techniques in the dialect of his full bloods in the Fus Fixico letters.
26. A biographical sketch of Oskison appears in *New York Times*, February 27, 1947, 21:3.
27. DeWitt Clinton Duncan, "Magnificent Tom; or a Brave Girl's Fate," *Indian Chieftain*, December 21, 1899; Ora V. Eddleman, "Lizonka, a Creek Girl," *The Twin Territories*, 1 (May-October, 1899), 113-114, 122-123, 138-141, 167-171, 183-189, 209-211, 227-228; Bertrand N. O. Walker, "Tah-seh-tih's Sacrifice," *Indian School Journal*, 7 (March, 1907), 33-39. Lists of the works of Duncan, Reed and Walker, respectively, appear in Littlefield and Parins, *A Biobibliography of Native American Writers, 1772-1924*, 44-48, 141-143, 172-173.
28. See, e.g., W. H. Johnson, "The Saloon in Indian Territory," *North American Review*, 146 (March, 1888), 340-341; W. M. Fishback, "The Failure of Government in the Indian Territory," *American Magazine of Civics*, 6 (January, 1895), 96-98; Orville H. Platt, "Problems in the Indian Territory," *North American Review*, 160 (February, 1895), 195-202; Henry L. Dawes, "The Indian Territory," *Independent*, 52, (October 25, 1900), 2561-2565; David W. Yancey, "Need for Better Government in the Indian Territory," *Forum*, 28 (February, 1900), 737-740.