War and Violence: Reading David Treuer's *Prudence* as Native North American War Fiction

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Superficially, David Treuer's 2016 novel *Prudence* seems typical of the canonic euroamerican war novel; detailing both combat in Europe and the complexities of personal relationships in Minnesota during the 1940s and '50s, Treuer tells of the battle- and home-fronts, emphasizing the shifting boundaries of violence. He insists that:

> people think of Minnesota as a quiet place full of nice people and […] of World War 2 as a noble effort that happened far away. [*Prudence* turns] that all around: Minnesota is not as quiet […] and World War 2 [did not] happen far away, it happened right here. (Mumford)

Like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, or Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, both genre-defining war novels, *Prudence* collapses the distinctions between past and present, between here and over there.[1] This collapse allows for a profound exploration of violence, demonstrating its pervasive reach. Contrary to the portrayal of wars (and other violence) as deviations from the norm, *Prudence* showcases a continuous U.S. American aggression, refusing the narrative of the United States as inherently pacific, extolling the ideals of liberty and equality. Treuer develops this interrogation further, centering the role that Native bodies play in these games of violence. *Prudence* questions the established structures that enable and necessitate war, thereby investigating and challenging the legitimacy of the U.S. American nation state.

Prudence hinges on the events of an afternoon in 1942, exploring their immediate and long-term effects. Treuer tells the stories of Billy and Frankie, reunited for "one last glorious August, one last innocent holiday before Frankie

[joins] the world and the war" (*Prudence* 9). While Frankie, white, middleclass, has just graduated from Yale University, Billy, who is Ojibwe, has been "peeling spruce for five cents a stick" and "gutting and filleting fish" for the past years (41). Despite their different life situations and recurring geographic separation, Billy and Frankie have spent their teenage summers falling in love with each other, developing an emotional and physical relationship that has stretched into early adulthood. However, while Billy seems secure in both his love for Frankie and his own queerness, Frankie tries to hide his same-sex desires, locked in the expectations of mid-twentieth century white masculinity.

On the afternoon of Frankie's arrival in Minnesota, his friends inform him that a pair of German prisoners of war has escaped from a nearby prison camp, and Frankie suggests a search party to capture the escapees. Overzealous and intent on proving his manhood, Frankie mistakes Grace, a young Ojibwe girl hiding from the authorities, for the POWs and fatally shoots her. Grace dies in her sister's arms, the titular Prudence, leaving her traumatized. Billy, realizing Frankie's impotence in the face of responsibility, claims Grace's murder. Frankie deploys soon afterwards, having resolved neither his relationship with Billy nor admitted the truth to Prudence, taking up a post as bombardier in Europe.

As historical fiction, *Prudence* suggests a traditionally rendered war novel. Fundamental to the euroamerican imagination and its literature, violence and war have found their way into fiction since the epic poetry of Homer's *Iliad* (written between 1260 and 1180 BC), continuing through the Elizabethan dramas of William Shakespeare and the Realist novels of Leo Tolstoy and Stendhal, to the anti-war narratives of the twentieth century; its objective, as McLoughlin argues, to give meaning to chaos and manage the violence: "writing about war somehow controls it, imposing at least verbal order on the chaos, [making] it seem more comprehensible and therefore safer" (13). However, the implicit aestheticization

through language, as well as the historization of events necessarily leads to a representation that allows (and even encourages) romanticization of war, while establishing violence as essential to the cultural and societal fabric of Europe and, particularly, that of northern America.

Based on documented events (the presence of German prisoners of war in Minnesota, the sequence and geography of World War 2, the details of training and aerial combat) and historical figures (the teenage, Ojibwe Prudence Bolton), Treuer seems to follow this desire to control the past. A self-proclaimed World War 2 expert, he states that he undertook diligent research, reading histories, perusing soldiers' autobiographies, and "imagining himself into [Frankie's] plane" to capture the true feeling of experiencing war (Grossmann).

And yet, while *Prudence* allows the "re-experience [of] the social and human motives which led men to think, feel, and act just as they did in historical reality", typical of the historical novel, Treuer surpasses this objective, bending history and exposing its biased narratives (Lukács 44).

The novel's catalyst is Prudence herself. "Based on a historical person thrust into a rural Minnesota community", Treuer envisions his main character as the incarnation of Prudence Bolton, a young Native woman, immortalized as the first woman that Ernest Hemingway claims to have had sex with (Grossmann).[2] Bolton is further recorded as having committed suicide with her partner at age 19. This is, as Treuer emphasizes, all that is known about her. While there are "thousands and thousands of pages devoted to the life of Hemingway […] all we know about this Native woman is two sentences"; information that reduces her to her gender and death, robbing her of an extended existence in the world (Grossmann). Bolton's historical near-invisibility highlights how history treats Native North Americans (and Native women in particular), "never really [allowing them their own] complicated, flawed, and tumultuous human experience", leaving them as anecdotes to white lives instead (Grossmann).[3] Treuer declares further that Bolton "stayed with [him]

because [her treatment] betrayed a kind of systemic unfairness", and that he thus envisioned his novel as her story, allowing her "an attempt at self-possession and recovery" (Davies). In an effort to amend history, Treuer thus tries to give her story space, her chapter the only chapter told in first person.

It should however be noted that Treuer here follows both in the complicated footsteps of male authors appropriating female voices and of authors more generally trying to excavate narratives that have been violently suppressed. Despite the already monumental task of locating Native histories and voices in a master narrative that denies, curtails and limits their existence, Treuer here insists that he can reclaim Prudence's story, a woman who has been utterly lost to and by history. There is a certain "impossibility of recovery" when engaging with records "whose very assembly and organization occlude certain historical subjects"; Prudence is a footnote to Hemingway because the grand narrative necessitates both his sustained existence and her absence: the historical narrative is dependent on this duality (Helton et al 1).

Saidiya Hartman argues similarly, stating that recovery of lost histories is indeed impossible as the dead cannot speak (12). In her essay "Venus in Two Acts" (2008), she discusses the barely remarked upon death of two girls at the hands of a slave trader. Hartman states that "the loss of [such] stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it is tempting to fill in the gaps and provide closure where there is none" (8). Like Prudence's story that lacks all details about her life, the two girls seem to demand more information, more history. And yet, Hartman cautions against this, the potential new story also violent in obscuring the structures of power that have silenced it. These stories thus become complicit—to an extent—in further disguising how history manufactures reality. Hartman asks instead to "[strain] against the limits of the archive" and step back from trying to "[recover] the lives" or "[redeem] the dead", thus moving to "paint as full a picture of the lives of the enslaved as

possible" (11). While this is undoubtably Treuer's objective, it bears remembering that "rescuing" Prudence from obscurity and affording her "self-possession" is complex, particularly via a male voice.

Prudence begins her teenage years as a victim of repeated rape, this immediately manifesting the dispensability of female Native bodies in US American settler society and mirroring the experiences of Native women from the beginning of colonization into the twenty-fist century. Treuer however does not give in to victimry completely, so avoiding a dangerous stereotype. Instead, he places the violence against Prudence into a larger context of U.S. aggressions. Prudence almost nonchalantly explains that her rapist "was one of them who had been away to the Great War", linking warfare with rape and destructive masculinity (*Prudence* 237). This further connects the historical and contemporary mistreatment of Native women with the violence of World War 1. Prudence's rapist, a veteran, is presented as a violent man who exerts power over the vulnerable, crucially unsettling the idea of heroism linked to war, instead revealing a system of sustained violence that connects the home- and the battle-front.

Violent men, and their brutality against Native women, were central to westward expansion across the United States; the eventual removal of Native peoples and the establishment of secure white settlements almost conditional on the amount of violence tolled out by the settler-colonizers: more violence ensures more territory, faster. Treuer stresses this connection.

Prudence remains casually linked with sex (both consensual and non) throughout the novel, before having sex with Billy after his return from fighting in World War 2. While their encounter is not physically violent, it is emotionally fraught, Billy's motivations layered in a yearning for Frankie. The section culminates in Billy's brutal declaration that Frankie never loved Prudence, and that his care of her following Grace's murder was entirely motivated by guilt—guilt at having been the shooter and the inability to shoulder the blame (*Prudence* 213). Sex, while

consensual, is again coupled with war-colored masculinity, Billy's unnecessary revelation nourished by his trauma-induced drinking, as well as his need to claim Frankie for himself.

Although Prudence and her sister manage to escape their abusive childhoods (and later boarding school), Prudence is permanently traumatized by her sister's murder. Grace's death, also arguably an indirect consequence of war (and confused masculinity), is never fully resolved. Neither Frankie nor Billy are directly punished for the murder; the implication here being that the lives of Native women are aggressively dismissed and consistently exposed to a white violence inherent in the colonization of the Americas.[4] As Sarah Hunt argues

> colonialism relies on the widespread dehumanization of all Indigenous people—[…] children, two-spirits, men and women—so colonial violence could be understood to impact all of us at the level of our denied humanity. Yet this dehumanization is felt most acutely in the bodies of Indigenous girls, women, two-spirit and transgender people, as physical and sexual violence against [these groups] continues to be accepted as normal. (qtd. in *Reclaiming Power and Place* 230)

Prudence seems to function here as representative for contemporary Native concerns, spotlighting the continued effects of colonialism in northern America. While this is surely relevant, it again raises the specter of Treuer's appropriation of Prudence's story. Utilizing her to depict the struggles of an entire group of people arguably robs her of a personal fate, devaluing her yet again—apparently the opposite of Treuer's goal.

Alongside Prudence, Treuer uses the imprisonment of German soldiers in Minnesota camps as impetus for the novel's unravelling. As detailed by Tracy Mumford, World War 2 created a demand for soldiers, and subsequently, a lack of able-bodied men on the home-front, and thus a labor

shortage; in Minnesota (and other states) this shortage was met by the importation of German POWs:

> They harvested beets outside of Hollandale, Minn. and worked the lumber camps of Itasca and Cass counties. More than 15 camps were established in Minnesota, housing some of the 400,000 POWs brought to the United States. (Mumford)

While introducing "the enemy" into Middle America fueled wide-spread anxiety over escaping and marauding prisoners, only very few managed to actually flee the camps. As Gunnar Norgaard, the assistant executive officer at Algona (Iowa) argued, "the American guards discouraged any notions the Germans may have had about escaping, with stories about a surrounding wilderness inhabited by timber wolves, bears, and dangerous Indians" (qtd. In Lobdell).[5] However, on October 28, 1944, two German prisoners managed to escape. Trying to return to Germany via the Mississippi and New Orleans, they surrendered three days into their escape. Treuer coopts this incident and, dismissing notions of historical accuracy, molds it to his own narrative: in *Prudence*, the prisoners escape two years prior in 1942 (before the widespread establishment of German prison camps in the United States), deliberately challenging the established historical timeline.

Treuer seems to be doing two things here; while gesturing towards historical authenticity—the escaped prisoners—and thus manifesting the legitimacy of his narrative, he also consciously upsets it—by setting the escape in the wrong year and state—thus "[demonstrating] the gap between written text and truth" (de Groot 11). Superficially this again seems characteristic of historical fiction, historical fact expelled by playful narrative manipulation; here however it also exposes a Native North American tendency to disregard the established progression of time. Where euroamerican epistemologies view time as linear, developing from a to b to

c, Native time is variously understood as "a rubber band, stretchable, or as little loops", as time running parallel, neither past nor future but "always [as] all the times, [differing] slightly" (qtd. in Dillon 26). And precisely because the prisoners' escape sets the story in motion, explicitly challenging the set course of history, it suggests a skepticism of time as fixed, preferring a Native concept of mutable time. The incident of the escaped prisoners is a means of illustrating that essentially it does not matter when (or if) the prisoners escape, as the events that lead up to their escape as well as those that follow will happen regardless: Frankie will die, the relationship between Billy and Frankie will crumble, and Prudence will commit suicide.

While such a coupling of inevitability and timelessness also prevails in English Modernism, (notably in works by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce), it here stipulates an even more comprehensive critique of violence and war. Read as such, *Prudence* implies that the strict ordering of time that underlies history suggests a portrayal of violence as contained, as a bounded segment on the progressing thread of history; war and violence thus come to be seen as deviations from the norm, as lapses and not as the continuous force that they actually are. This recalls the bracketing of violence such as slavery, the Vietnam war or the institution of residential schools, instances presented as aberrations that do not represent the "real" American or Canadian national character. North American history, told from a settler-colonizer point of view, absolves itself from violence, instances of the same reduced to exceptions, reactions necessary to protect and promote freedom and democracy.

By insisting on the irrelevance of linear time and historical accuracy, Treuer proposes that violence spreads into every corner of northern American existence, just as the German POWs insist on encroaching on rural Minnesota. Even though the prisoners never directly interact with any of the

main characters, their mere presence shatters the illusion of separation from war and violence, manifesting war in the heartland of the United States.

This manifestation is further cemented through the character of Emma, Frankie's mother, who is confronted daily with the reality of war, wondering "why they [had] to put the camp right there, where you could see it out of the front windows?" (*Prudence* 4). Emma's observation immediately adds yet another layer: the home, conceptualized as the sphere of women, comes into direct (visual) contact with the realities of war, destabilizing both the idea of safety in the home, and the distance of women from war more generally.[6] The proximity of the POWs unsettles the idea of the civilian (here in the form of Emma) and forces her, as proxy for American women and children, directly into the periphery of war.

Such a portrayal of the home-front is again reminiscent of Modernist writings of war. With the advent of global warfare in the early twentieth century, war was no longer physically removed from the home. In the United Kingdom this first became apparent during World War 1; accustomed to wars in the colonies, the fighting in France was suddenly very close. Paul Fussell even argues that "what [made] experience in the Great War unique and [gave] it a special freight of irony [was] the ridiculous proximity of the trenches to home"; those living in Kent could hear the shells and bombs exploding across the Channel (69).[7] In her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Virginia Woolf focusses on the war's closeness and interruption by manifesting violence in the every-day of 1920s London, stressing both the continued presence of the war and its ability to spill over supposedly fixed spatial and temporal boundaries. A contemporary of Woolf's, Sigmund Freud stresses that World War 1 was the first (western) war to ignore "the distinction between civil and military sections of the population"—which is precisely what Emma experiences in Minnesota (279).

While she is far removed from the battle-front, the war teases her from her front porch and from inside her home, exacerbating the fact that Frankie is also about to actively join the war. The war is thus very much present in the every-day and not removed across the ocean.

It does bear mentioning that the line drawn between civilians and combatants has always been fluid; particularly in northern America, where the colonizing governments made use of settlers to further their military agendas (notably in westward expansion and the removal of Native nations). Contrary to the idea of safe civilians, Native women and children have always been under threat by the United States and Canadian governments and settlers always part of violent colonization, both thus directly exposed to violence.

Moreover, Emma, as a white, property-owning employer, suggests the substantial role that white women played in the process of colonization, reminding the reader that even if Emma sees herself (and has been taught to do so) as removed from violence, she has always been at the center of it. Arguably, protecting the home from outside threat can be realized as a prime motivator for westward expansion as well as continued aggression by settler-colonizers against Natives—the very invention of the savage and untamed land beyond the home of the settler-colonizer implies the necessity of (violent) protection, placing the home, and with it the woman, at the epicenter of violence. Emma thus comes to personify white settlers encroaching on Native land, her very existence underlining the absurdity of a safe home within northern America. White violence against Native North Americans is always already implied in the Americas, completely invalidating the idea of separate zones of safety and danger. Ultimately, the insertion of settler-colonizers creates a geography of violence; the United States cannot

offer a safe home to anyone.

Treuer returns briefly to the idea of Europe spilling across the Atlantic at the novel's conclusion, introducing a Jewish man into rural Minnesota and further blurring the perceived differences between "here" and "over there". Cast as a survivor of the Holocaust, he intrudes on the lives of Mary, a Native woman and local bar co-owner, and her husband Gephardt, a German. Again, the sanctity of the home is upset, this time more literally than it is for Emma; the Jewish man importing violence from Europe into the heartland, shooting at both Mary and Gephardt, actively reminding them of the horrors of World War 2. The violence of his appearance also adds a succinct parallel between the Shoah and Native genocide in North America.[8]

The ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Third Reich during the 1930s and 40s is a reiteration of the same "racial hierarchy built around [the] shared project of territorial expansion" of colonialism: the same ideas of racism, exploitation and geographical expansion (manifest destiny as an American version of the Nazi ideology of Lebensraum) that fed the very idea of colonialism are at work in continuing Native extermination and the Jewish holocaust of the twentieth century (Mishra). While there is an obvious continuity in the oppression of others here, Treuer also upsets this parallel of suffering by implicating a Jewish man in making a Native woman unsafe. Whether this indicates that experiencing trauma does not entail immunity from perpetrating abuse (also mirrored in Frankie, a gay man, killing Grace, a Native girl), or the more general observation that violence will find a way to persist, *Prudence* vehemently insists on the repetitive brutality of violence.

The Jewish man's appearance also gestures towards the existence of concentration camps in Europe, which in turn, hints at reservations, POW camps, and the Japanese American internment camps of World War 2 which saw citizens removed from their homes, dispossessed and incarcerated in

camps in the Midwest. Treuer's Jewish man links these experiences, drawing the Nazi concentration camps into the United States, while also casting a wider net that includes other colonial enterprises, such as the British camps for Boers during the Boer Wars at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Toland states:

> Hitler's concept of concentration camps, as well as the practicality of genocide owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history […] he admired the camps for Boer prisoners in South Africa and for the Indians in the wild west; and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America's extermination—by starvation and uneven combat—of the red savages who could not be tamed by captivity. (202)

This not only emphasizes the predominance of violence against others globally, it also calls into question the very character of the United States more generally, its presentation of freedom and democracy revealed as a possible hoax. The U.S. emerges as built on oppression, dispossession and brutality perpetrated by whites. It also undercuts the efforts of the Americans in World War 2, the shock at German racism revealed as hypocritical. Ultimately, Treuer seems to say that violence does not have to be brought onto American soil in the twentieth century, as it already exists, lurking at the heart of United States identity.

In conjunction with the POWs, Treuer also illustrates how war is brought literally into the home by returning US American soldiers. Both Felix, the Ojibwe caretaker of Frankie's parents' property, and Billy return from Europe marked by their respective war experiences, physically carrying their trauma from over-seas into Minnesota, further unsettling the idea of bounded spheres and emphasizing the absurdity of the notion of non-violent

spaces. By allowing both of these returning soldiers to be Native—Frankie does not return—Treuer again inverts the narrative, presenting home-coming not as triumph but as extended catastrophe, the treatment of Native North American veterans—ostensible heroes—a continuation of settler-colonizer abuses.

While mid-twentieth century Native American literature (Silko, Momaday) detailed the traumatic effects of combat on Native soldiers, recent novels and scholarship have moved to highlight Native heroism, focusing on such figures as Francis Pegahmagabow, Tommy Price, and Ira Hayes, as well as immortalizing war experiences in novels and biographies such as Joseph Bruchac's (Abenaki) *Code Talker* (2005) or Bradley James's *Flags of Our Fathers* (2001).[9] As Waubgeshig Rice (Ojibwe) formulates:

> [for] all my life, Francis Pegahmagabow has personified legend. […] Pegahmagabow was, and continues to be, the most prominent figure from our community of Wasauksing First Nation. Growing up in the 1980s, decades after he died, my cousins, friends, peers, and I heard story after story about his triumphs and troubles fighting for Canada in the First World War. (McInnes xi)

While Pegahmagabow, one of the most highly decorated World War 1 soldiers, is correctly remembered and celebrated as showing exceptional competence in the field, his ensuing efforts to ensure political freedom and independence for First Nations peoples are ignored in official eurocanadian tellings. His political career came to an abrupt end in the 1930s when Canadian policy changed; he even lost his position as Chief. His life is reduced to his participation in World War 1, made to fit a narrative that furthers the mythology of integration and heroic war effort, central to how Canada presents itself on a national and international stage.

In *Prudence*, Treuer interrogates this idea of war heroism by returning

Felix and Billy (from World War 1 and World War 2 respectively) to Minnesota. For both the war is a continuation of deprivation and loss, culminating in a staid normalcy, exposing a continuous, normalized violence against Native North Americans of which war is only a heightened form.

Introduced by Emma as the quintessential "stoic Indian", Felix slowly emerges as deeply affected by his involvement in World War 1. He demonstrates both the perpetuity and impossibility of containing violence spatially and temporally, again linking violence perpetuated against Native peoples with the world wars of the twentieth century. Felix goes to war because his options are limited, both in his community and in a wider U.S. American context, exemplifying the dearth of opportunities for Native men at the beginning of the twentieth century and the interconnections between disenfranchisement and joining the military in the U.S. He first hears of the war at a drum dance, where an older man:

> [is speaking] about the war overseas. [The man] walked back and forth and spoke loudly about how he was going on the war path as their grandfathers had done. Felix sat along the edge in the shadows with his wife. He listened and watched. He had no position on the drum. All doors were closed to him. So, after the dance he approached the singer and said he'd go with him. (*Prudence* 34)

This recalls research by Rosier and Holm that suggests that Native men went to war "as their grandfathers had done", thus following a warrior tradition, as well as underlining the dearth of other opportunities. Treuer recounts almost none of Felix's combat experiences, stating only that he had "clubbed three men to death with his rifle, had shot nine and had stabbed five with his bayonet" instead returning him to the United States to find both his wife and child dead by Influenza (*Prudence* 158). The Spanish Flu of 1918 was a

deadly pandemic that spread quickly across war-ravaged Europe and further to northern America and across the globe. Researchers have identified Étaples, a hospital and military base, as being as the center of the disease. While there are other theories that see the virus originating in Kansas or China (and then brought to Europe by American soldiers or Chinese war laborers), it is linked inescapably both to war and Europe, which allows for a comparison with European diseases brought to the Americas during colonization. Diseases such as smallpox, cholera and measles killed an estimated 90% of Native North Americans, effectively working as form of viral genocide. By introducing disease into the story, Treuer connects the theater of European war with the spread of illness: both European warfare and European disease invade and destroy Native lives and communities, thus identifying Felix and his family as victims of euroamerican violence. It also returns to the ultimate unsafety of the home: Felix cannot protect his family (even by potentially finding financial security or improving their social status through serving in the military) as the threat is already always inherent to existence in North America.[10]

Bereft, Felix returns to the drum dance, receiving "heaped blankets […] and pressed tobacco plugs" as acknowledgement for his service (*Prudence* 159). This is further significant because Felix only receives thanks from within his own community, reflecting Holm's findings that Native soldiers went to war not to attain respect from whites but from their own community and underlining that as a Native man it does not matter what he does, the settler-colonizer community will never honor him. While he now sits alongside the "old men who remembered 1862 and 1876 and 1891", accepted into the ranks of nineteenth century soldiers, he is adrift, taking what is awarded to him without comment of joy (159). By explicitly including the years 1862, 1876, and 1891, Treuer emphasizes the perpetual nature of

violence, particularly that of US American violence against Native North Americans. Felix's experience in World War 1 is cued as smoothly following nineteenth century wars, stressing the similarities between colonial violence and global warfare.

As Pankaj Mishra argues, euroamerican history aims to explain "the world wars, together with fascism and communism, simply [as] monstrous aberrations in the universal advance of liberal democracy and freedom" rather than as more pronounced manifestations of a continual violence against others. The dates given correspond to wars between Native tribes (primarily the Lakota Sioux), defending their lands and treaty rights, and the U.S. government, striving for more land and resources, motivated by greed and racism.[11] The link drawn between the elders and Felix's modern experiences carries this first global war into the circle of violence perpetrated by the U.S., stressing both the constancy of war and alluding to the necessity of violence in maintaining the U.S. nation state.

Billy, like Felix, manages to survive his war, returning to Minnesota in 1945. With Billy, Treuer insists on presenting a Native war veteran forgotten by society and left alone with PTSD, further upsetting the narrative of heroism rooted in war. Before returning Billy to Minnesota, Treuer falls into an almost canonic representation of warfare, detailing Billy's deployment as a member of the 2nd Division. Billy "had advanced, one in a division of ants, from Normandy on D+1 across the Aure and into Trévières, up Hill 192 and down into Saint-Lo and from there to Brest" (*Prudence* 195). This description coincides with the division's documented movements. By describing Billy's progress through France in accordance with military records, *Prudence* affords an authenticity to Billy that places him, and other Native soldiers, within history, as solidly located in a global violence. Simultaneously, Treuer

however also again destabilizes historical narrative. By telling Billy's story so close to the recorded facts, he is "consciously [deploying] fictional tropes to attain [a] quality" that is usually the property of historical documentation, thus demonstrating the narrativity of the same (de Groot 111). *Prudence* thus does both: unsettle the authenticity of historical fact and anchor Native soldiers in the history of global warfare.

On his return to Minnesota, Billy's injuries make him unsuitable for manual labor, and he starts working as "a spotter in [a] fire tower" (*Prudence* 185).[12] Billy physically carries the war into the United States through the damages wrought on his body, the body deemed necessary to protect the United States now incapable of returning to its former abilities, ultimately leaving him financially challenged and struggling to provide for his wife and two children.

In addition, Billy constantly "[feels] greasy and low and dragged out, as though at the end of another march through the bocage" (181). A mixed terrain of woodland and pasture, bocage is characteristic of the Normandy landscape where Billy spent most of his war. Bocage played a significant role in World War 2, as it complicated progress against German troops; Billy's memory and comparison of trudging through bocage again manifests France in Minnesota, confusing geographical boundaries that should suggest safety. Billy reflects on his trauma, realizing that "being around […] uniforms, even being around […] other servicemen" puts him "out of sorts"; he thus avoids visiting Veteran Affairs (189). The war has also turned Billy into an avid day-drinker, if not into an outright alcoholic; driving home from town he routinely stops "at a bar in Royalton" as well as various veterans' bars, drinking vodka while he drives (189; 199).[13] While this reads as a familiar narrative of trauma—alcoholism, flashbacks, injury—Treuer here casts it in a specifically Native context, demonstrating the continuity of Billy's treatment by the

whites around him that does not change by his contribution to the "war effort". While he is originally accepted as a playmate for Frankie while they are growing up, both Emma and Jonathan (Frankie's father) remark on the fact that Billy is socially and racially inferior to them and that Frankie needs to realize this reality. Billy is valued in his youth as a hard worker around town, as well as a helper to Felix, but only within limits that do not extend beyond manual labor at a clear remove from the whites. Treuer here seems to suggest that Billy's participation in World War 2 is simply another step in his "being worked" by the settler colonizer while he remains solidly marginalized when deemed not useful.

Thus, Billy, even though he survives, functions as anathema to the returning hero, offering a counternarrative to the newly inscribed heroism of Native soldiers who have, through their service, been elevated and established as successful and valuable parts of US American society—so long as they remain usable within the grand narrative. As Holm states, "for a significant number of Indian veterans the return to the United States was not what they had expected" (*National Survey* 24). The opportunities claimed as rewards for military service almost never materialized, and most veterans "discovered that [service] had only lowered their status within the American mainstream" (24). This contextualization is powerful as it subverts the corollary of heroism and war that continues to dominate much of the literary and historical discourse on Native participation in war and instead opens up a space to acknowledge that the very idea of "noble service" (regardless of who goes to war) serves primarily to reinforce national narratives and ensure the continued existence of the nation state.[14]

Writing war through Native bodies prompts a realization that North America is mired in violence. Emphasizing the continuity of violence against

Native others allows Treuer to connect the beginnings of colonial oppression with westward expansion, to twentieth century global warfare and the treatment of Native people today. It also allows for a broader view of the violence inherent in colonialism and white expansion throughout history and across the globe: the same ideologies of violence that govern the abuse of Native people are at play in international wars and global genocides, the concept of racial superiority and the push for land that motivated colonial rule in the Americas, Asia and Africa is at work in the Jewish holocaust, the exploitation of raw materials in the Congo during the nineteenth century, the annexation of Poland in 1939, and the westward push ordained within manifest destiny. By repeatedly centering the connections and continuities of violence, *Prudence* unsettles the master narrative of the United States as a democratic nation based on the ideas of freedom, equality and opportunity for all, revealing it instead as a perpetrator of racial injustices, oppression and sustained violence against those considered other.

At the same time however, Treuer also creates space for new ways of telling a North American past that while exposing these contradictions also affirms the continuous existence of Native peoples. Prudence, Felix, Billy and Mary all demonstrate an ability to survive, and while they do not thrive, they very much exist within the present of Treuer's story, locating themselves as contemporaneous.

With *Prudence*, Treuer creates a historical novel that moves Native soldiers and lives into focus, while also revealing history as a narrative constructed to tell a particular story. Treuer not only joins Native history with US American history, he also inserts himself—and the stories of Prudence, Billy, Frankie and Felix—into the canon of war fiction: by imagining the life of Prudence Bolton, alluding to McEwan's *Atonement*, and pointing to Hemingway, Treuer situates himself and Native stories at the center of a

global literary tradition.

Notes

[1] Treuer was directly inspired by *Atonement*, "impressed by how Ian McEwan picked apart time and place and wrote a character-driven novel about people caught up in events above themselves" (Grossmann).
[2] Hemingway was quoted as saying that "the first woman [he] ever pleasured was a half-breed Ojibwe woman named Prudence Bolton" (Grossmann).
[3] Hemingway's 1933 short story "Fathers and Sons" also tells of "Trudy" (short for Prudence), the narrator naming the Native North American girl as the beginning of his sexual exploits. The story also features an Indigenous character named Billy who while not explicitly part of Nick and Trudy's intimacies is privy to them. Clearly autobiographical, the short story also relates to violence and war, the father (Nick Adams) driving his son through his hometown after a hunting excursion; Nick Adams is loosely based on Hemingway's own life and a number of short stories follow his life from boy to young man, detailing his work as an ambulance driver during World War 1, as well as his return to the United States after the war. Treuer also includes a character named Ernie who almost catches Billy and Frankie mid-kiss, his name surely a nod to Hemingway, strengthening the connection further. Ernie can be read as an inversion of the Native anecdote character, here Hemingway himself becomes the anecdote to Prudence's story.
[4] It could be argued that Frankie and Billy are punished for their transgression after all – Frankie dying months before the war's end and Billy living a life devoid of happiness.
[5] The correlation of wolves, bears, and "Indians" is telling for the 1940s attitude towards Native people; an attitude that Treuer marks in *Prudence*.
[6] By extension it thus also destabilizes the gendered spheres of war as masculine and the home as feminine, indicating that there is, again, no separation possible here and that the assumed difference is falsely maintained by such dichotomies.
[7] Arguably, for the United States, this closeness is echoed in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. As the first true attack by a foreign nation on U.S. American soil, Pearl Harbor made it very clear that the U.S. were implicated in global warfare.
[8] This parallel is not new – it has been gaining traction since the late 1990s, and while it remains controversial – many oppose the comparison, claiming it lessens the Nazi atrocities – it appears in numerous essays, short stories, poetry and novels. See: Sherman Alexie ("The Game Between the Jews and the Indians is Tied Going into the Bottom of the Ninth Inning" (1993), "Fire as Verb and Noun" (1996)), Eric

Gansworth (Haudenosaunee) ("American Heritage" (2006)), Ward Churchill (*A Little Matter of Genocide* (1997)), etc.

[9] Ira Hayes is a particularly interesting case, as he was highly decorated and participated in the much publicized raising of the flag at Iwo Jima. Ironically, Hayes "could not vote when he returned to New Mexico" after service; he died of alcoholism at the age of 32 (Rosier 116). However, the photograph of Hayes and his compatriots is still reproduced and used liberally to "symbolize the success of ethnic integration" in the U.S. (116).

[10] For Native North Americans, the Spanish flu was even more devastating than for whites, the "mortality rate was four times greater than that of white Americans living in large cities" (qtd. in Lyons 31).

[11] 1862 refers to the Dakota War of 1862, an armed conflict between the United States and several bands of the Dakota. After numerous treaty violations and failure to correctly distribute annuity payments by the US government, causing increasing hardship and hunger among the Dakota, the Dakota attacked euroamerican settlers. In the aftermath, 38 Dakota were hung, the largest mass execution in US history. 1876 refers to the Great Sioux War (or Black Hills War), a series of battles between the US and the Lakota Sioux/Northern Cheyenne. Wanting to secure gold, the US wanted to buy the Black Hills. The Cheyenne and Lakota refused. The final Agreement of 1877 officially annexed Sioux land and permanently established reservations. Finally, 1891 refers to the Ghost Dance War, an armed conflict between the Lakota Sioux and the United States which lasted a year, culminating in the massacre at Wounded Knee where the 7th Cavalry murdered approximately 300 unarmed Lakota Sioux, primarily women, children and elders.

[12] In his survey on Vietnam veterans, Holm mentions that almost 50% of Native North American veterans faced unemployment after their service, "despite the fact that many of them achieved relatively high education levels after their military service" (National Survey 21). This marginalization of Native American vets is visible from World War 1 onwards, their systemic discrimination central to Silko's *Ceremony* and Wagamese's *Medicine Walk*. The combination of PTSD and limited work opportunity forced many Native veterans into poverty and substance abuse, their "service" to their country forgotten.

[13] The alcohol that Billy consumes is given to him exclusively by white men; possibly a passing remark on the role that the settler-colonizers played in exposing Native North Americans to alcohol and addiction, and a further nod to the dichotomy of abuse and dependence experienced by settler colonizers and Native populations.

[14] While this essay does not discuss Billy's sexuality, it is relevant: by depicting Billy as traumatized by both war and Frankie's continued refusal to acknowledge their love, Treuer suggests a link between the two rejections. Frankie's inability to acknowledge and denial of their relationship marks the power of a heterosexual

ideology that forms the basis for the values of bravery and heroism that define the masculinity deemed necessary for warfare. Frankie's understanding of his own masculinity as flawed due to his feelings for Billy must be rectified by joining the war effort and establishing a normative masculinity. This version of masculinity is celebrated in war, and Frankie, once he realizes the errors of his behavior, dies, implying that war allows no space for other forms of masculinity. Frankie ultimately cannot survive because there is no space for his version of masculinity in the United States; Billy, however, does survive but settles into a heterosexual relationship that fails to satisfy him.

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