

Tuesday, June 24, 2008

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[More on Tanya Landman's APACHE: GIRL WARRIOR](#)

Last week, I posted [my initial thoughts](#) on Tanya Landman's book, and, I posted [Beverly Slapin's review](#) of the book. My copy of the book arrived a few days ago. I've read it and am sharing my thoughts today with readers of this blog, but I'll also be featuring the book in a lecture I'm giving at the University of Arizona. (As I write these words, I'm in Tucson. My hotel window is open and I'm enjoying the breeze and the qualities of the air. Dry heat. I love it. As I walked in the 108 degree heat yesterday, I reveled in the feel of that heat. I'm a guest of the [American Indian Language Development Institute](#), an outstanding program that is now in its 29th year. If you work in a school that serves Native children, I urge you to look at the website and enroll in this summer program.)

Back to Landman:

[Note---I'm adding to this post as I spend more time with the book. Comments I add today (June 27th) will be in **red** typeface.]

Landman's book is on the shortlist for a the [Carnegie Medal](#), a prestigious award in Britain. From the medal's website is this:

The book that wins the Carnegie Medal should be a book of outstanding literary quality. The whole work should provide pleasure, not merely from the surface enjoyment of a good read, but also the deeper subconscious satisfaction of having gone through a vicarious, but at the time of reading, a **real** experience that is retained afterwards.

Note that the word 'real' is in bold typeface. Also note that the book should provide a "deeper subconscious satisfaction of having gone through a vicarious" and "real experience that is retained afterwards." What does 'real' mean to the people who wrote the criteria, and what does it mean to the people who will select this year's winner of the medal? Does it mean accurate, or correct? When people say "this is the real deal" or "the real McCoy" they mean genuine. If that is the way the Carnegie considers the word, then Landman's book doesn't meet the criteria.

As Landman says in her note "I've made no attempt to produce an accurate historical novel." And, she says, the story she tells is "based on events" and "inspired" by an autobiography of Geronimo. So, what does all this look like in her book?

Landman's characters are of the "Black Mountain Apache" tribe. There is no Black Mountain Apache; that is a fictional tribe Landman created. In that fictional tribe are characters based on real people. Her characters include:

"**Siki**" - the main character. She and her brother, Tazhi, are "orphans." In English literature, there are a lot of characters who are orphans. This status is the impetus for a lot of journeys, in which the character seeks to learn who he/she is, and the circumstances by

which he/she became an orphan. With unique characteristics, this orphan is often a hero. This orphan theme is, I think, incorrectly applied by non-Native writers creating stories about Native peoples. Based on what I know from personal experience and from study, the concept of 'orphan' (an outcast, solitary existence, abandoned, alone, without someone to care for you) doesn't apply. Paula Gunn Allen wrote about this in her book *The Sacred Hoop*. She said "Indians... care for their children... You never see an Indian orphan..." (p. 49 of *Sacred Hoop*). So, anytime I see a Native character speaking of him or herself as an orphan or described that way in the narrative, I view it as an error. Do children lose their parents? Yes. The difference is, that in our communities the child is not only the child of his or her parents, but of the community itself. Someone will take care of that child. A grandparent, an aunt, or an uncle, or an adult sibling.

"Tahzi" is Siki's little brother. He's four years old when killed by Mexicans. Brutally killed. His head is chopped off. His death opens the story. Landman writes: "Tazhi was sent to the afterlife, condemned to walk for ever headless, and alone." Native peoples, like any peoples, have ways of thinking about death. "walk for ever headless, and alone" seems rather melodramatic to me. Necessary for the story that Landman wants to tell, but it'll take some more research and conversation for me to know how well what she says fits with Apache ways.

"Golahka" - he is a "powerful young warrior" married to "Tehineh." They have three children who are killed by the Mexicans. His wife and children and Tahzi are killed at the same time in Landman's story. Their deaths bring Golahka and Siki together. As the story progresses, she will ride with him as they both seek vengeance. At the end of the story, Mexicans use big guns to fire on Golahka and Siki and others who are fighting the Mexicans. A rock is blasted loose, strikes him on the head, leaving a wound that, by the next day, will have killed him. Before he dies, though, he pulls Siki to him and says:

"We have the same heart, Siki," he whispered, his breath warm in my hair. "The same soul. We have grown from the same earth, you and I. Our roots entwine in the living rock. Hold fast to that certainty. It is the only truth that matters." So it was that in the gathering dark of that hidden valley, I became wife to Golahka. By dawn I was his widow.

The phrase "became his wife" means they had sex. Through this act, Siki is pregnant with his child. From my study of Landman's book, Golahka is based on the man commonly known as Geronimo.

"Chodini" is the leader of the Black Mountain tribe Siki and Golahka belong to. The pregnant Siki goes with him to surrender to the "White Eyes." These are the American soldiers. They kill Chodini. Chodini is Cochise.

In looking at characters, Landman strives to make them 'real' but is it ok to borrow so heavily from a peoples history, "stretching" (Landman says) things to make it all work? I'm not sure. Certainly, that is part of the craft of writing. Creating this or that, but I don't think it's ok when you're doing historical fiction. And, I especially think this is problematic when there is so little known about the actual people a book purports to be

about. This medal is based on 'real' and I don't think Landman's book meets that criteria.

Some stats from the book.

I did some word counts. These are "at least" numbers. I may have missed occurrences of some of the words listed below.

butcher appears 4 times
slaughter appears 4 times
hacked appears 5 times
revenge appears 6 times
avenge appears 8 times
vengeance appears 10 times
ambush appears 13 times
slain/slay/slayed appears 20 times
war/warfare/warpath appears 28 times
blood/bloodied/bloodshed appears 44 times

These are powerful words of violence. The impetus for this entire story is given to the reader on the first page. This is a story of revenge. Revenge drives the protagonist. Her pursuit of revenge is unrelenting. The people she lives? They're intent on revenge, too. Rarely (relatively speaking) does Landman refer to men as men. She uses the word "warrior" to stand in for men. That word is used 233 times. In contrast, men/man/boy/boys is used 53 times.

At one point in the story, one of the "warriors" makes a hole in the roof of a church where the Mexicans are gathered for Sunday services. He drops a "chilli bomb" into the church. Other "warriors" have barred the doors so the Mexicans can't escape. They're killed by that bomb. Problem? I don't know what a chilli bomb is! I can find no references to it in any of the searches I've done. That includes searching in academic journals and books. I am finding references to it on Google, as an item being used and/or in development in India for crowd control...

Things to think about:

Is Landman aware that, all through the story, Golahka calls Siki "Little Sister" but at the end of their time together, they sleep together... Siki says "by dawn I was his wife."

On page 219, Landman talks about beauty, beauty that "makes men breathless." I'll have to check on this... My first thoughts? Native people appreciate beauty, but there's a difference. Landman's presentation aligns well with European/American notions of women and beauty.

On page 270, is this paragraph:

In revenge, Chodini tied the dead White Eyes by their ankles and dragged them behind his horse, galloping around the fort in fury, heedless of the shots that flew past him, that the White Eyes' chief might see what his actions had cost him.

Sound familiar? Hector? The Trojan War?

Apache: Girl Warrior did not win the Carnegie. It is, however, slated to be released in the US as *I am Apache*. A fellow critic said it has been getting a lot of buzz in the book world. I have not seen reviews of it in US journals yet. It stands to reason that US reviewers might have a more critical eye on this kind of book, but we will see.

If you want to know more about the Apache peoples, visit these sites:

[White Mountain Apache Tribe](#)

[Nnee - San Carlos Apache](#)

[Chiricahua Apache Nde Nation](#)

[Jicarilla Apache Nation](#)

[Yavapai-Apache Nation](#)

[Fort Sill Apache Tribe](#)