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THE WIND RIVER SCRIBE: GRACE DARLING WETHERBEE COOLIDGE AND HER *TEEPEE NEIGHBORS*

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Abstract

Grace Darling Wetherbee Coolidge's 1917 book *Teepee Neighbors* is a little-known collection of twenty-nine sketches of Indian life on the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming, where she worked as a missionary from 1902 to 1910. Only recently have Coolidge's personal papers been made publicly available by the Pioneers Museum in Colorado Springs, Colorado, allowing scholars to investigate the true contours of her life for the first time. These primary source materials shed new light on a woman who—though born to great privilege in New York City—rejected a life of leisure and wealth in favor of a subsistence existence on a remote Indian reservation, devoted to charitable acts. This paper offers the first accurate essay-length biographical treatment of Grace Coolidge. It as well analyzes selections of her *Teepee Neighbors* as an attempt to generate sympathy among white readers for a colonized people, the Arapaho, and to offer a critique of Euro-American society from the standpoint of the communal Indian values she encountered at Wind River. Coolidge's project, however,

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is ultimately hampered by her own ethnocentrism and admitted inability to understand Indian cultures.
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In the opening vignette of Grace Darling Wetherbee Coolidge's 1917 book *Teepee Neighbors*, she converses with a visitor to her ranch on the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming, where she labors with her Arapaho husband as an Episcopal missionary. The visitor, a good friend, is a reservation resident, half Arapaho, half white, and in a "sardonic" mood (23). For some time, he "passionately" criticizes white attitudes to Indians, condemning their ethnocentric arrogance and notions of superiority (23). As he expresses his frustration over and over, Grace finally protests, "But look at me! Look at me!" (23). In her opinion, she has always respected Indians and tried to help whenever and however possible. At this, the enraged guest attacks Grace's interference in the life of his tribe, reproving her efforts to impose white medicine, clothing, and morals on her neighbors. Just as the argument reaches an impasse, there is a faint knock at the door. Outside stands a "wizened" Arapaho elder, with whom Grace cannot communicate (25). Her friend explains that the man was passing, and chilled by the winter weather, wants to warm himself inside. Invited in, the elder takes a seat near the stove and sits in silence, staring at Grace and her guest as they continue arguing. Eventually, Grace becomes unnerved by the old man's content but "detached and somnolent" air (25). She wonders aloud whether he is "bored," to which her friend retorts, "I thought you understood Indians" (26). Grace considers giving him a book of pictures to look at, thinking it will be "much better for his mind" (26). Her friend mocks this effort to "civilize" the elder, but Grace insists (26). A few moments later, the old man takes a keen interest in one of the book's images. The guest's attention is also drawn, and as they gaze at the page together the old Arapaho emits an "aged Indian chuckle" (27). Grace asks why. As it turns out, the picture in question is of a "naked 'savage'" splayed on the ground, about to be bludgeoned by a white man holding an axe (27). The elder quips, "if an Indian had made that picture he would have had the white man on the ground" (27).

"The Man with the Axe," as this story is called, tells us a great deal about what Grace Coolidge strove to achieve with *Teepee Neighbors*—a collection of twenty-nine sketches of Wind River life based on her personal experiences, almost unique as an example of western literature. We see in just this short excerpt how she presents the Indian perspective on U.S. government assimilation policies at the turn of the twentieth century, even while implicating herself in their failures and admitting her inability to understand fully the peoples that have fascinated her since youth. That youth, though spent mostly on the American continent, had unfolded very far from the West. Indeed, if told only of Grace Coolidge's early life as a glamorous New York socialite, one would wonder how she ended up on a distant Indian reservation married to an Arapaho Indian, living a hard scrabble life devoted to missionary work. This story—or at least the real story—has not really been told. Though *Teepee Neighbors* was republished in the 1980s and

again in the 2010s, both reissues have offered little accurate biographical detail on Coolidge in their prefaces (Cornell 1984, xv–xxvi; "Publisher's Notes" 2018, 1–7). The main reason for this failure is that Coolidge's papers have only recently been made available to the public, donated by her grandchildren to the Pioneers Museum in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 2018. Meanwhile, Coolidge's book itself has been ignored by scholars of western literature and general readers.

Perhaps the cause for this fact is that *Teepee Neighbors* is an unremittingly depressing book that discusses the Arapahos' struggles with near starvation and premature death, and their profound grief at the loss of old ways under the U.S. government's reservation system. In her book's preface, Coolidge herself calls the truths she reveals "crushing and appalling" (9); nevertheless, in its time *Teepee Neighbors* garnered high praise from some critics. None other than H. L. Mencken admired its "great quality of pity" and "moving" simplicity. It was, he wrote, a book that "leaves something behind it" (Cornell 1984, xxiv–xxv). That is arguably true, even if Grace Coolidge and her writings have remained obscure. This essay, drawn mostly from her correspondence with life-long friend and perhaps lover, Anne Talbot, offers the first accurate biographical essay on Grace Coolidge. Fleshing out the life that produced *Teepee Neighbors* as well lends greater context to a complex book that attempts to explain the struggles and perspective of another people to white readers. In analyzing selected stories along the way, we see how Coolidge simultaneously criticizes Euro-American society from the standpoint of communal Indian values—even if her critique is sometimes hampered by ethnocentrism and attendant Indian stereotypes.

Grace Darling Wetherbee was born on July 25, 1873, in Auburndale, Massachusetts, to Hannah and Gardner Wetherbee ("The Coolidge Family" 2018, 1). Her mother's ancestry could be traced back to the first English colonists, while her father owned and operated the famous Hotel Manhattan, a sixteen-story building on East 42nd Street known as the tallest hotel in the world. As members of New York high society, the Wetherbee family were fixtures at the Metropolitan Opera and other cultural bastions. Their sumptuous townhouse on 72nd Street was, no doubt, a magnet for the city's social scene ("Publisher's Notes" 2018, 4). Both Wetherbee daughters, Grace and older sister Alice, were groomed to perpetuate this lifestyle. In the mid-1890s, Grace studied at the prestigious Ogontz Finishing School for Young Ladies, in Pennsylvania, and spent a semester in Paris. Alice meanwhile pleased her mother greatly by marrying a Hungarian aristocrat, an ideal match for a lady of her station (Ellis 1955, 18). Grace, however, was different. As a child, she whimsically believed that Indians were her "cousins," and in another adolescent fantasy that she never fully explained, felt that it was her destiny to marry one (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 12 November 1899; 26 February 1903). When a young woman at Ogontz, Grace fell under the influence of a fellow student named Anne Talbot, daughter of Ethelbert Talbot, Episcopal bishop of Wyoming. Anne reignited Grace's interest in Indians and inspired a new devotion to religion and missionary work. Though her parents were not particularly pious, Grace took it upon herself to be baptized and confirmed in the

Episcopal church in her twenties. She afterward stated that all of her previous life had been "wasted" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 4 July 1896). In 1896, Grace visited the Talbot family in Wyoming and toured Wind River Reservation, home to the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone. There she met Shoshone chief Washakie, as well as future husband Sherman Coolidge, an Arapaho Episcopal missionary who had been raised by adoptive white parents since age nine (Van Orsdale 1893, 85–86). This was not a straightforward romance. Though Sherman flirted with her intensely after their first meeting, Grace was uninterested. Instead, she left Wyoming apparently in love with her college friend, Anne, as well as the West's landscapes (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 2 April 1897).

Over the next few years, Grace struggled with her feelings for Anne Talbot and searched for a way to bring larger meaning to her privileged life as an heiress. Complicating matters was the fact that Talbot evidently reciprocated, but could not bring herself to break out of social convention (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 1 June 1901; ca. June 1902). In 1900, Grace's growing "socialistic ideas" and general angst led her to enter St. Faith's Deaconess Training School in New York City against the strenuous objections of her mother (Ellis 1955, 18; Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 1 June 1901). In 1901, she got her first chance to head west as an assistant missionary on Utah's Uintah & Ouray Reservation, residence of the Ute Nation (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, ca. May 1901). The experience was revelatory but trying. For the first time in her life she was performing tasks such as cooking, while also acting as nurse to both ailing and injured Utes. The Utes, however, did not meet her own expectations. In one letter she referred to them as "not very good Indians," indicating that her romanticized notions of Indian life were beginning to come under scrutiny (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 21 June 1901). In another letter, she called the conditions on the reservation "miserably discouraging," but expressed her deep thanks for at least having "some excuse for living" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 24 June 1901). With her general enthusiasm for Indian missionary work undiminished, Grace was ordained a deaconess the next year. She soon headed west again, this time to Wind River, where she had been invited by head Episcopal missionary John Roberts to oversee the reservation's mission school for girls (Ellis 1955, 18). In taking up this work, Grace became an active part of a U.S. government "peace policy," meant to Christianize and "civilize" Native peoples held as wards under the U.S. government's Office of Indian Affairs (Lewandowski 2019, 4–5). She believed deeply in this mission, as did Sherman Coolidge, then living at Fort Washakie, the reservation's administrative center.

Just prior to her leaving for the West, Grace apparently decided to cease any romantic entanglement with Anne Talbot and separate physically (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, ca. June 1902). Grace expected to work hard at her new job, but in fact there was little to do. She soon realized that she disliked the Shoshones, whom she called "magpies"—slang for "stupid people." Thus, she made little effort to understand their culture. The Arapahos, however, she found "real" and "nice," though they had no interest in adopting Christianity (Grace

Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 25 June 1902). Bored and alienated from most of those around her, Grace was drawn to Sherman, whose sense of humor and education made him a good companion (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 5 August 1902). The ensuing courtship was something neither expected. Evening handholding developed into what Grace called "twosing"—contemporary slang for "petting" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 20 August 1902). And within a few months Sherman proposed—thereby vindicating Grace's long-held belief that she would marry an Indian (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 1 September 1902). She remarked to Talbot in letters that Sherman's ethnicity made contact with him feel natural, "so much realer than any (man) body" she had ever encountered (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 10 September 1902). The Coolidges' wedding took place in October 1902 following a massive battle with John Roberts, who at first refused to marry the mixed-race couple on the ostensible grounds that Grace's father had not consented (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 22 October 1902). In truth, Grace's family were horrified by her union with a man some among them suspected to be a "blanket Indian"—or traditional Indian who has retained all his customs and traditional dress (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 20 November 1902). Grace actually considered herself more Indian than Sherman, who in her opinion had become "too much of a white man" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 26 February 1903). In later years she would wear moccasins and use Arapaho baby carriers to transport her infants (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 20 August 1903; *Report of the Executive Council on the Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Society of American Indians*, 91–92.). None of these choices pleased her east-coast relatives. Relations with mother Hannah Wetherbee were destroyed irreparably (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 30 May 1903). As a couple, however, the Coolidges were extremely happy. The evening of their wedding they moved into a ranch Sherman had built years before to serve as a missionary outpost (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 2 November 1902). Many of his kinsfolk camped in the ranch's corral, and all of them welcomed Grace's presence into the extended family (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 27 December 1902; ca. 26 February 1903). Within two years, she had given birth to two children, a boy and a girl. But that is when the tragedies began.

In the winter of 1904, each of the Coolidges' babies died suddenly within the short space of five months; the son of typhoid; the daughter of pneumonia. Grace gave birth to another son in October of 1905, but he, too, expired in her arms after just a few days, victim of a congenital heart defect ("The Coolidge Family" 2018, 1–2). These devastating experiences had a profound impact on a once carefree woman who had, until then, led a life sequestered from grief and hardship. The death of infants and children was, in fact, a common occurrence at Wind River. Grace herself later wrote in *Teepee Neighbors* that among the "hundreds" of Indian mothers she had known, not one had "all her children living" (12). Some anguished parents would have become withdrawn and despondent, but Grace, now possessing of a rare empathy, resolved to honor her children's memories by making "the best come out of it" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 22 November

1904). She began a life of service to Wind River's Indians, making regular trips across the reservation, distributing food and medicine, and offering to take in any orphaned or needy children (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 25 October 1905). Articles ran in eastern papers recognizing her work—even if their tone was sometimes incredulous. One titled "Very Silly Woman or Exaggerated Story" (1906) informed readers that Grace had donned Indian garb and rejected "the conventions which govern white society" to become "an angel of mercy" to the unfortunate (21). A similar report for the Episcopal journal the *Spirit of Missions* lauded Grace as "God's own blessing sent to the Indian babies of the reservation," explaining that the Indian young "she does not adopt she cares for in one way or another, and the Indian mothers bring their babies to her whenever they are ill" (Thomas 1910, 120). What the *Spirit of Missions* did not mention is the degree to which many Arapaho and Shoshone viewed Grace as an outsider determined to interfere and impose her own cultural values. Even when the tribes had a difficult time providing for the young, they were averse to giving their children away to a white woman deeply entrenched in the government's policy of destroying their culture (Coolidge 1917, 16). Over time, the Coolidges' joint assimilationist efforts would make them increasingly unpopular with Wind River's residents (Fowler 1982, 107, 324n59). Still, the desperate material conditions on the reservation prompted some residents to relent. In 1906 and 1907, the Coolidges managed to adopt an eight-year-old Shoshone orphan named Effie and six-year-old Virginia, an Arapaho girl whose father was a distant cousin of Sherman's. Grace gave birth to her first surviving child, Sallie, in 1907 ("The Coolidge Family" 2018, 3).

That same year an event occurred at Wind River that demonstrated the enmity many Arapaho felt toward missionary efforts, and the control that the Office of Indian Affairs exercised over them. One evening when the Coolidges' colleague John Roberts was returning to the reservation, he was attacked by a group of Arapaho warriors, incensed at the Indian Office's continued ban on the Sun Dance, their primary religious ritual, as well as the government's failure to make payments for lands ceded years before ("Indian Troubles in Boise" 1907, 248). This was not the only source of hostility on the reservation. Roberts and Sherman Coolidge had by then developed a frosty relationship, stemming from Roberts's initial refusal to marry Sherman and Grace back in 1902 (Duncombe 1997, 366). Disregarding any notion that the Arapaho and Shoshone preferred their own belief systems, the Episcopal hierarchy assumed that the missionaries' poor working relationship accounted for the slow progress in Christianizing the reservation's population. Thus in 1910, Wyoming's bishop abruptly transferred Sherman to a mission on the Southern Cheyenne Reservation in Oklahoma (Thomas to Coolidge, 13 June 1910). The Coolidges, in truth, were eager to leave. Grace in particular felt shunned, and had come to realize how her evangelicalism had deeply alienated the Arapaho (Fowler 1982, 107, 324n59; Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 16 April 1913).

The couple's exit from Wind River coincided with the death of Hannah Wetherbee back in New York City. After many years of estrangement, Grace

was now able to revive relations with her more compassionate father (Gardner Wetherbee to Grace Coolidge, 12 January 1910). As Sherman headed to his new post in Oklahoma, she headed east for the first time in almost a decade (Grace Coolidge to Sherman Coolidge, 18 October 1910). Grace joined Sherman in the small town of Enid, Oklahoma, several months later and took an instant dislike to her surroundings (Grace Coolidge to Sherman Coolidge, 25 January 1912). Sherman was equally unhappy and requested a transfer that was promptly denied by the state's bishop (Sherman Coolidge to Francis Key Brooke, ca. April 1911). As Christmas of 1911 approached, Grace wrote Anne Talbot of the "dread" she felt having to celebrate the holidays in Enid, which she deemed "dismal, footless, [and] friendless" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 15 November 1911). In a town without so much as a "modern library," Grace quickly became bored and restless (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 16 June 1912). Compounding her ennui were Sherman's constant absences. His duties included considerable travel, and in 1912 he became president of the Society of American Indians, the most visible Native-run reform group of the early twentieth century (Hertzberg 1971, 82). When left behind at home, Grace often felt like a "a martyr to babes and food" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 11 August 1915). She refused, however, to let circumstances defeat her.

On November 15, 1911, Grace Coolidge revealed to Anne Talbot in a letter that she had been hard at work during every free moment she could find, "doing something horribly audacious, horribly!" She explained that she had composed "some Indian sketches," or "little snapshots" of her time at Wind River, each of them "all true." Twenty-five vignettes had flowed from her pen in just four weeks, and she planned to produce several more. The haste with which the compositions had appeared was not indicative of any dabbling carelessness. Instead, the writing had resulted from an explosion of inspiration. Coolidge herself was surprised by the burst of creativity, likening it to a pregnancy: "It's funny I'm writing again after all those stuffed up years in Wyoming. It's not worth it, I'm convinced but I tell you solemnly *I can't help it* [emphasis in original]. The things are in you and they stir to get out and what's more they have to come out just as absolutely as the babies do. I know, cause I've felt them both." Putting her experiences on paper had been as exhausting as childbirth; and though Coolidge "adored" the process, it left her feeling like "a squeezed lemon." Doubts also lingered regarding the stories' quality. She could not determine whether they were "a little bit good or just plainly rank." The time had come, though, to offer them for public consumption—even if the idea of others reading her work made her feel "utterly naked." One solace was that she could at least be buried with them. "Dust to dust," she remarked. Coolidge, however, sought to avoid this fate, asking Talbot if her father might help through his connections in the publishing industry, specifically *Harper's* magazine (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 15 November 1911).

Whether the Bishop Talbot contacted any editors is unknown, but Grace Coolidge never published in *Harper's*. Instead, success came elsewhere, and quickly. In 1912 and 13, several of her stories appeared in *Collier's* and the

Outlook, both highly-regarded, popular magazines. Her works were even given pride of place, supplemented with high-quality illustrations (Coolidge 1912, 651–55; Coolidge 1913, 16–17). Grace managed another distinct success in 1914, publishing a children's book with Rand McNally, *Paddy Paws: Four Adventures of the Prairie Dog with a Red Coat*. By this point, the Coolidge family had managed to leave despised Enid, Oklahoma, for Faribault, Minnesota (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 13 February 1912). In 1912, Grace had also given birth to another daughter, named Rosie, who distracted her from more literary ventures ("The Coolidge Family" 2018, 4). But as it turned out, Faribault was no more exciting than Enid. Grace dubbed the city the "land of the Lotus eaters" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 28 March 1914). Then things changed dramatically. In March 1916, Grace's father, Gardner Wetherbee, died in Manhattan at age eighty-two. Grace soon after learned that she had inherited over a million dollars—equivalent to twenty-five million today. "No fun being a millionaire here," she joked in a letter to Anne as her family planned their escape from Faribault (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 26 April 1916).

Teepee Neighbors finally appeared in book form in 1917. It had taken Coolidge a full six years to publication following her spurt of creativity in the fall of 1911. She referenced this dogged struggle to find a publisher in the book's preface, noting how most editors had been hostile to her work, believing that readers would naturally avoid "such painful stuff" (9). (Perhaps periodical editors had more willingly accepted her sketches, knowing they could be balanced out with lighter material.) *Teepee Neighbors*' publisher, Four Seas Company in Boston, was a small press known for printing the early works of modernists such as William Faulkner and William Carlos Williams—excellent literary company. Coolidge would have probably preferred a larger publishing house, but Four Seas may have offered her more personal attention. She always felt that publishing was "a perfectly blind thing" in which the author was treated like "a rank outsider" by editors (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 8 July 1916).

Though Grace Coolidge had been an active part of the assimilationist "peace policy" meant to Christianize and "civilize" Indians, in *Teepee Neighbors* she condemns Office of Indian Affairs wardship. Her preface asks why Native peoples are forced to "die for want to medicine and surgery, and food and nursing" when the government holds millions of their dollars in trust (17). Coolidge likewise exposes the lack of basic civil rights under a reservation power structure that can imprison Indians indefinitely with no recourse to bail or legal representation. There is a particular focus on Native women. Soldiers stationed on reservations, she explains, are ostensibly there to protect the population, but instead often become "the greatest menace to our women and girls" (18). Widespread malnutrition, poor sanitary conditions, and the absence of proper medical care mean that curable diseases meanwhile result in the death of young and old alike. Grace dedicated her book to one of the few organs concerned about such matters, the Society of American Indians, deemed "the truest expression and the brightest present hope of the Indian People" (1).

Teepee Neighbors is—to a large degree—a record of Grace Coolidge's experiences as a reservation missionary. "Every incident" and "every character," she stresses, is "drawn from" her former life, even if not every event "happened just as it is set" (9). Interestingly, Coolidge's correspondence from the period at times notes events that appear in the book. In the spring of 1906, Coolidge wrote to Anne Talbot that "a big ice jam" in the little Popo Agie, a stream that runs through Wind River, had melted, sending down a flash flood that upended a stagecoach carrying the outgoing mail. The postbags had been washed down river, and the local postmaster had offered five dollars for every sack found. A letter to Talbot had been in one of those sacks, and she explains that "Everyone has been trying to remember ever since what letters they posted that day" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 17 April 1906). In another case, Coolidge had tried to adopt a three-year-old orphaned girl from an Arapaho village, but was ultimately rebuffed by a female elder (Coolidge 1917, 16). The flood and the elder feature in vignettes titled "A Man" and "Mothers," respectively, each discussed below.

Yet to present *Teepee Neighbors* in this purely biographical manner would be to ignore its greater function as a literary work that consciously seeks to encourage sympathy and understanding for the distinct ways of Indians and their situation as colonized people—a delicate feat for an author once so invested in Christian proselytizing on Wind River. Because it is impossible here to offer a summary or analysis of every one of the twenty-nine sketches in the collection, this paper looks at three representative stories that show how *Teepee Neighbors* depicts the separate challenges endured by men, women, and children. Presenting these vignettes both demonstrates what Coolidge was trying to accomplish in her writing, and exposes what today might be considered problematic aspects of her work in perpetuating stereotypes of Natives as helpless victims of colonialism, often given to superstition. But even while some of the Indian characters she sketches may appear typecast, Coolidge paints them humanely, and with respect. They are victims, perhaps, but highly resilient victims with worthy and unique qualities absent in Euro-American society. As Coolidge notes in her preface: "Undoubtedly in rejecting the Indian we have lost some valuable ingredients from our national melting pot" (15). As such, many of her stories contain subtle and deft critiques of Euro-American thinking, and of how white society lacks laudable values that Indian societies boast.

If there is a story that effectively reveals these themes while also establishing the setting of *Teepee Neighbors*, it is the aforementioned "A Man." "Half of the tribe was starving that winter," it begins, going on to describe the death from malnutrition of a young woman forced to subsist on dog meat (140). Government rations are meagre and means of survival hard to find. There is work for some Indian men on the reservation provided by neighboring sheep ranchers—but those few employed tending herds go unpaid for weeks. Then one night a catastrophe occurs. With "the sound of an explosion," an ice damn breaks and turns the Popo Agie River into a raging torrent (140). The sheep grazing adjacent are swept out of their pens and drowned. For the next few days, Arapaho men use long poles to

fish out the dead animals for consumption. The ranchers do not protest as long as the men bring back the pelts. There are other casualties from the night of the flood, as well. A stagecoach driver had been crossing the river the moment the first wave appeared. He jumped from his seat in time to watch his horses be carried away and subsumed in a dark, oily muck. The stage itself was also lost, along with a large cargo of mailsacks. The agency post office offers five dollars for each sack found, prompting every Arapaho man in the surroundings to stand vigil along the river banks like a line of "Equestrian statues" with "eyes fixed to the point of hypnotism" (142). Coolidge focuses in on one among them, Howling Wolf (the titular "Man"), to embody the degree of demoralization that has set in among Arapaho society under the reservation regime. Howling Wolf is a sympathetic, gaunt figure, an "old Indian" who does not speak English (143). He has lost all of his children in infancy, causing a "dull ache" in his soul that compels him to betray his spouse (143). At quieter moments, he sits in his teepee daydreaming of "vanished game" and "going over eternally the past, the days of youth," when he gallantly courted his wife by playing melodies on a flute (143). When reminiscing about these "days of achievement" becomes too painful, Howling Wolf heads to the nearest town to find "distraction and temporary oblivion" in gambling (143–45). Because he is "too 'Indian,'"—meaning "honest"—Howling Wolf is easy prey at the card table (145). White men cheat him unmercifully.

The day in question, Howling Wolf, sitting on his horse by the river scanning for mailsacks, finally spots one within his grasp. Just then, the ice collapses on the far bank and a white cowboy and his horse plunge into the oleaginous river. Howling Wolf immediately disregards the mailsack and expertly sends out his lasso, which encircles the drowning man. He drags the half-frozen cowboy to shore and carries him to his teepee, where he and his wife nurse him back to consciousness. Coming to, the cowboy recognizes Howling Wolf as the Indian he and his friends "cleaned out" at the card table not long ago (147). Howling Wolf, in the meantime, tries to covey his regret over having no food to offer. Yet because of the language barrier, there is no real communication between the two parties. Though he himself is poor, the "right grateful" cowboy gives his last money, a fifty-cent piece, to Howling Wolf's wife, designated for "a little grub" (147). As the white man departs, each party waves goodbye. With this end, Coolidge makes several points. Though demoralized and exploited, Indians like Howling Wolf ultimately remain correct in their priorities: exhibiting generosity and hospitality, while valuing human life over the opportunity to acquire money. These are, of course, attitudes not reciprocated by the settler population toward Indians. Howling Wolf has literally saved a man who once personally stole from him, turning his story into an allegory for colonialism in which the supposedly "savage" Indian is revealed to have the true moral core. Coolidge's use of the language barrier meanwhile suggests that were there more understanding between Indians and settlers, whites like the cowboy—who has experienced a revelation in being saved by an Indian—could recognize a basis for friendship.

While "A Man" explores the effects of colonization on Arapaho males at Wind River, the sketch "Mothers" discusses the sorrows the female population must bear in a mire of scarcity and penury. Grace Coolidge is visited in her cabin one afternoon by two women, one elderly, one young. Grace is "stupid with weariness," having been kept awake most of the night by her infant son (79). We know from Coolidge's correspondence that the incident described here must have taken place in the fall of 1904, and that the boy is her first child, Louis, born in April of that year (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 20 August 1903). Grace's visitors examine Louis concernedly and ask, "Is he sick?" He is, of course. The women then sit and try to make conversation—the younger woman, Katherine, translating for the older one. Grace asks Katherine how many children she has. Katherine answers, "Three" (79). Grace's face registers surprise, given that it is "so seldom that you see an Indian mother separated from her children" (79–80). "Two are dead," Katherine quickly clarifies in a low whisper, "And one isn't born yet" (80). "Then you'll be happy again," Grace offers, as a "vague tenderness" radiates from the young woman's eyes (80). The two Indian women enquire about her husband Sherman's whereabouts. He is away for the day but will be returning late that evening.

Eventually, Grace cooks her guests some supper. She understands that this is "the hungry time of year," when government annuities have been spent and buying on credit is difficult (81). The women need her food, which they consume "voraciously" seated on the floor, rejecting the use of chairs (81). Suddenly, the old woman stops eating and begins placing some meat and bread in her shawl. "She say she take that home to her man," Katherine explains in imperfect English (81). It is at that moment that Grace notices the old woman's "marred" hands—each finger missing its last joint (81). Grace understands that this is an "ancient" mourning custom, and asks cautiously, "She has no children living, has she?" (80–81). "No," is the answer; the old woman has lost nine children (81). The evening wears on and the visitors stand vigil over the sick baby. An owl hoots in the distance, which in Arapaho culture is superstitiously believed to be a "marauding ghost" emitting "the wail of the dead" (83). At long last, the young woman asks Grace whether she is afraid to stay alone in her cabin at night, with no man. "Oh! no," Grace responds, finally realizing that the women have stayed with her out of politeness, so she would feel safe (83). After she assures the women that she will be alright, they rise to leave in obvious relief. Grace calls out "Goodbye" as they disappear into the night (84). Just as she shuts the cabin door and returns to her baby, "the cry of the owl" permeates the night (84). Here Indian superstition becomes foreshadowing to those familiar with Coolidge's biography. In late October 1904, her son Louis contracted typhoid and died. This became, as stated previously, the defining event that prompted her to devote her life to the Indians on the reservation in his memory (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 22 November 1904). Louis's death as well bonded Grace Coolidge to the fate of so many Wind River women who had also lost children. And if perhaps her depiction of these women is hindered by references to their imperfect English

and traditional beliefs in the spectral, Coolidge ultimately suggests the solidarity all women feel as mothers, and the caring of a people who concern themselves with the welfare of even a tribal outsider.

In "A Venture into Hard Hearts," Coolidge describes the help she herself offered her teepee neighbors, while highlighting Indian/white cultural differences through a child's perspective. The story tells of a trip off reservation for medical treatment, to Denver, Colorado, with a small Arapaho boy. The two have traveled before, but never so far, and never by train. Though the arrival of the locomotive terrifies him, the boy's "dark eyes twinkled and gleamed" once seated, and his lips reveal an "effort to repress the joy that was proving itself irrepressible" (102). Initially, everything is a source of wonder. He asks Grace the identity of everyone they encounter in the train compartment, and he is "astonished, even incredulous" when she cannot answer such basic questions (102). He of course comes from the reservation, a real community in which everyone knows one another "at least by name and appearance" (102). Because of the "exigencies of train connections," the pair is forced to spend the night in Cheyenne, Wyoming (102). When they leave the hotel in the morning, the boy exclaims innocently, "Wasn't that strange man good to let us stay in his house?"—not understanding the concept of paying for board, but only that of honest hospitality (103). Back on the train, the boy asks how much the tickets cost. Grace answers ten dollars. The boy is horrified. "Why, you shouldn't have given all that money for them," he remarks, confused, "They are only pieces of paper" (104). Money is something that he has no experience with, and he is "much impressed" that doing anything in white society seems to require it (104). Here the Arapaho child's perspective develops into a critique of Euro-American society's dependence on pecuniary exchange as a foundation, rather than on tribal forms of cooperation, support, and generosity.

All of these perturbing conundrums vanish upon arrival in Denver. Exposed for the first time to the city, the boy is dazzled by the "streets garish with lights" and "clattering and crying of voices," which present a remarkable contrast to the quiet of the reservation (104). "Is this fairyland?" he asks (104). These energizing new surroundings even make him shed his natural "timidity" (104). On a bus he speaks in a "brave, loud voice" that draws the attention of the other passengers. Only when one asks, "This little Injun's first trip?" is the boy "suddenly self-conscious again" (105). Later, the hotel's elevator—which he calls "the alligator"—disturbs him; but he takes solace in the fact that at least they do not have to pay for it (106). When he and Grace finally visit the doctor for the examination, it turns out that the boy's treatments will take longer than expected. The pair must find new lodgings, and trudge through the city searching for a room to rent. At one house, the lady who answers the door explains that they "won't take no children" (106). Grace is "dashed," having "lived so long amongst a people to whom a child represented the chief blessing in life" (106). That evening at the hotel some friends visit, and Grace recounts the day's events. The boy remains quiet until Grace brings up the woman who said "no children" (106). At that, he straightens up and with a "stiffened" mouth announces to everyone: "What

do you think she said to us? …She told us they didn't like children! They didn't want *me*!" [emphasis in original] (107). The guests, Coolidge comments, cannot understand the "enormity" of his revelation without knowing the "Indian point of view" (107). That night when they retire the Arapaho boy cries softly in his sleep, having realized that "life was turning out to be not just what he always thought it" (108). Coolidge explains: "He was indeed beginning the toil of the long inevitable years of unlearning" (108). What the boy must unlearn to integrate himself into white society are the very "valuable ingredients" that could—as Coolidge states in her preface—improve an individualistic, anonymous America that fails to appreciate children to such a degree that it refuses them shelter for the night (15).

"A Venture into Hard Hearts" reveals the vast cultural gulf between Native and white value systems, and the painful process of adaptation that Indians must undergo in assimilating to the world outside reservation boundaries, based on currency rather than mutual affection and tribal ties. Just as with *Teepee Neighbors*' opening sketch "The Man with the Axe," Coolidge asks the reader to change their perspective, and become more sympathetic to a people with different—and in some respects more humane—values. Whether this was possible is ultimately moot. Despite receiving praise from H. L. Mencken, *Teepee Neighbors* was hardly a bestseller. Mencken had reacted to what he saw as the work's "great quality of pity" (Cornell 1984, xxiv–xxv). His reading of "pity" for the Arapaho is understandable, but knowing Coolidge's personal history in Wyoming it is clear that the quality of empathy was at play in her stories about the losses of Arapaho mothers. Recording such experiences must have brought back painful memories for Coolidge; and as it happened, she seems to have stopped writing on Native topics after *Teepee Neighbors*' first printing in 1917. That year, however, she published a sort of postscript: two pieces for the Society of American Indians' flagship periodical, the *American Indian Magazine*—each inspired by her time as a missionary, and each critical of the U.S. government's treatment of indigenous peoples. In "The White Plague," she presents a series of sketches of Arapaho life perhaps even more gloomy than those in *Teepee Neighbors*. In one, an orphaned child described as a "skeleton" dies slowly of tuberculosis, victim of indifferent school teachers and reservation authorities (172). In her only overtly political article, "Wanted: To Save the Babies," Coolidge explicates the ubiquitous problem of infant mortality at Wind River, where babies die in the second year "for the sheer lack of milk"—something the government could easily rectify simply by spending a bit more money (19). Coolidge obviously cared deeply about these matters, but no more published articles or stories followed.

That Grace Coolidge did not publish more in magazines of greater circulation is regrettable. Her talent for writing and first-hand witnessing of reservation conditions could have potentially spurred engaged white readers to take some greater political action. In this way, she could have become a trusted mediator who could have gained at least material support from female Progressive-era activists with similar backgrounds and cultural assumptions. But then again, Indian rights had little chance of inclusion in the national agenda at a time of

international catastrophe. In April 1917, the United States Congress voted to declare war on Germany, commencing a vast mobilization of citizens and resources, and a concomitant crackdown on pacifists, dissidents, and left-wing labor organizations (Kennedy 1980, 85–86). Grace Coolidge found the entire conflict tragic and declared herself "neutral," writing in a letter that though the Germans were currently "hateful antis," every nation on earth was capable of a "policy of frightfulness" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 11 January 1916). Coolidge became more and more opposed the longer the conflict continued. By 1918, she had become distressed by the widespread jingoism exhibited by the American public and declared herself a believer in "honest pacifism" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 8 February 1918).

These were of course private views, and from the period of the Great War onward Grace Coolidge and her husband Sherman led a mostly private life. The year after *Teepee Neighbors*' publication, the Coolidge family settled in Denver, Colorado, the setting of "A Venture into Hard Hearts." A few years later the couple and their children moved to quieter Colorado Springs, where Grace continued her work with Indians ("The Coolidge Family" 2018, 1). In the summers, she sometimes hosted sick children in her home, trying her best to nurse them back to health (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 25 March 1925). During these years Grace and her husband traveled as well, Wind River Reservation being a common destination. When there, a curious nostalgia inspired "spells of talking about building up the ranch and going back for a while every year." But Grace decided that no matter what your feelings, "You can't go back and recapture vanished phases of life" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 1 October 1931). When she wrote these words, she was unaware that the main phase of her own life was about to conclude. Sherman died a few months later, on January 24, 1932 ("The Coolidge Family" 2018, 1). Grace mourned the loss, comforted by the knowledge that she had made her husband's life "richer and happier" (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 9 February 1932). She did not entertain ideas of finding a new partner. Anne Talbot had by then been long married, precluding any domestic arrangement between the old friends. Coolidge instead relocated to the luxurious Broadmoor Hotel, just a few blocks from her home in Colorado Springs (Goodnough 1935, C5). Though she remained active, traveling to Hawaii and California, Grace Coolidge did not enjoy much longevity (Grace Coolidge to Anne Talbot, 25 April 1937). In November 1937, she sustained a broken hip, expiring just a month later on December 28, 1937, age sixty-four ("The Coolidge Family" 2018, 2). Three Episcopal bishops attended her funeral in honor of her life-long devotion to missionary and charity work (Ellis 1955, 29).

Teepee Neighbors, Grace Darling Wetherbee Coolidge's epitaph in the literary world, was reprinted by University of Oklahoma Press in 1984 and by Big Byte Books in 2018, indicating that some interest still exists in this attempt by a white woman to explain her experiences in the world of Indians. Still, today Coolidge would likely be criticized for being a "white savior" who denied the agency of those she sought to help, in perhaps assuming that they were too weak to help

themselves. Some might also accuse her of being self-serving in her quest to find purpose in life, just as others might call her donning of Arapaho clothing cultural appropriation. But Grace Coolidge was arguably smarter and more self-aware than to fall into these categories. Instead, she openly admitted her inability to grasp fully the nature of those about whom she writes, as well as the futility and, essentially, the wrongness of trying to change them. Here we again return to "The Man with an Axe," which commences her effort to make white readers see the perspective of Native peoples under colonialism, and contains condemnations of the ethnocentric arrogance of missionary interference on Wind River—condemnations, of course, that she directs at herself. All of this seems to amount to a bundle of contradictions never fully resolved. Toward the end of her life, Coolidge made $7,000 donation to one of the Episcopal missions at Wind River—an act that indicates how she, who well knew of the Arapahos' resistance to white religion, still felt that Christianization and assimilation efforts were worth continuing (Markly and Crofts 1997, 100). Grace Coolidge's staunch belief, and her *Teepee Neighbors*, remind us of how the bonds of ethnocentrism limit even the most sensitive and engaged of observers.

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