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Shirts Powdered Red: Haudenosaunee Gender, Trade, and Exchange across Three Centuries by Maeve E. Kane, and: *Under the Skin: Tattoos, Scalps, and the Contested Language of Bodies in Early America* by Mairin Odle (review)

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MULTIPLE TITLE REVIEW

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Maeve E. Kane, *Shirts Powdered Red: Haudenosaunee Gender, Trade, and Exchange across Three Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2023). Pp. 366; 12 b/w illus., 5 maps, 15 charts. \$64.95 cloth.

Mairin Odle, *Under the Skin: Tattoos, Scalps, and the Contested Language of Bodies in Early America* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2023). Pp. 168; 13 b/w illus. \$39.95 cloth.

Two new books focus on the way that bodily alterations—some over the skin, some under the skin—revealed the political nuances of settler colonialism in North America. Maeve Kane’s *Shirts Powdered Red* centers on Haudenosaunee women facing European colonization, traversing three centuries from 1600 to 1900. Mairin Odle’s *Under the Skin* covers a slightly narrower time frame, from the 1580s to the 1780s, but encompasses multiple Native American societies. Both books are densely researched and written, and each yields insights into the complexity of colonial-Indigenous interaction through the early modern period. More intriguingly, perhaps, each also yields some telling insights into the state of eighteenth-century imperial studies.

Both authors begin with a discussion of a watercolor portrait of an Indigenous woman. Kane opens with “Mohawk Woman” from the 1780s, attributed to George Heriot. She suggests in her introduction that this image encapsulates “the historical reduction of non-European people to anonymous others with no histories of their own” (5). She points out that the woman in the image wears entirely European-manufactured clothing, which erases the subject’s own choices, and divorces her from “any information about her own history” (5). This blankness, Kane laments, represents much of her own findings when pushing the colonial evidence about Native American people too far—usually such endeavor ends up only highlighting what has been lost or forgotten. She goes on to state that her book will

thus not attempt to tease out the experiences of women like the one depicted, but instead will seek to “examine how and why Indigenous people like the Mohawk woman . . . have been so often rendered anonymous” (13).

Odle opens with an earlier watercolor—one by John White from the 1580s. It is also of an Indigenous woman, though White’s subject does not wear recognizably European garments. Rather, the focus here is on what happened under the subject’s skin, rather than to it. The depicted woman is extensively tattooed on her face and arms. Odle remarks that White was, in copying these tattoos, “attempting to decipher the messages such marks might carry” (13). Odle’s book, however, does not primarily pursue the colonial perception of Native adornments on *Native* bodies but instead studies the colonial practice of adopting so-called Native adorning customs for their *own* bodies. In addition to tattooing, Odle investigates scalping, intrigued by how these indelible customs were taken up by newcomers and then imbued with colonial meanings: “this book, then,” she writes, “is about embodied experience but also the creation of narratives to explain those experiences” (4).

Kane, thus, claims to eschew the history of experience in her book’s beginning, understanding that the attempt to do so in the case of colonized peoples is not only futile but also perhaps a symptom of colonial hubris itself. Odle is more comfortable claiming a history of experience, because she says it will be the experience of the more powerful colonists. Strangely enough, however, while both books under review here are hugely admirable and enjoyable, each seems ultimately to counter its central contention. Kane winds up attempting to speak for Haudenosaunee women to quite a substantial degree. She argues that they played larger roles in colonial America than appreciated by using trade in materials as a way of maintaining Indigenous identity and sovereignty. Correspondingly, Odle extrapolates the significance of corporeal adornment far beyond its practice. She argues that it is in the stories about the meanings of body modification that we can find the true instability of the colonial project. That neither author was entirely accurate about her book’s ultimate accomplishment says less about her self-awareness than it does about the generally unstable status of “experience” today in histories of empire.

Kane’s *Shirts Powdered Red* is a long book of seven chapters, ordered in roughly chronological sequence. The first chapter features three early modern individuals: an outsider woman, probably of African descent; a French captive called Pierre Raddison; and a Haudenosaunee girl called Félicité, who lived for some time in an Ursuline Quebec convent. The point of the chapter is to illustrate how Haudenosaunee women not only “incorporated” these people into communities, but also in fact created the communities through their “domestic and reproductive work in clothing and maintaining . . . members” (47). What stands out most, though, is how much rich detail we get of the lives of the three individuals—of their experience, in other words.

The second chapter focuses more singly on one person, a Haudenosaunee woman called Osissijenejo who went to market in Albany in 1690 to exchange some fur for a linen shirt. Out of this act, Kane skillfully unspools the transformation in Indigenous-settler trade in this era—a time when the Haudenosaunee sold their furs at advantageous rates for those European goods which “fit within [an] existing set of needs and allowed [a Native woman] to spend her time and labor on other work” (75). Kane suggests that this era saw the Haudenosaunee with the upper hand. They got useful items, while settlers only got “intense anxiety . . . over their own abilities to define and control Indigenous territories” (76). Settler history features more dominantly in this chapter but Osissijenejo still carries

the most light. Settlers again populate the next chapter, but once more curiosity resides most of all with the Haudenosaunee. Kane elaborates here how the early eighteenth century saw the Haudenosaunee integrate European goods (including clothes) further and further into their “daily performances of self and community creation” (112). They were the most at ease with the exchange, while the settlers still battled with the brute imperatives of need. Such an imbalanced set of outcomes, Kane argues, made Native independence loom “ever larger as a concern for both British and French colonial officials” (112).

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss, in different ways, the topics of religion and materialism in the 1700s. The former shows that religion was a special point of connection between European and Haudenosaunee women. Through it, an illicit inter-imperial and cloth-involved trade could flourish. While empirically this “enriched European men in New France and New York,” its existence worried colonial men from both camps (137). The trade was “increasingly viewed as subversive and dangerous” into the 1740s, which in turn fueled the formalization of diplomacy between Europeans and Native peoples in North America (137). The next chapter focuses on Eleazar Wheelock’s famous attempts to inculcate Haudenosaunee youngsters with European religious and material values from the 1760s. His perceived failure to do so reveals not only the overlooked forms of resistance by Haudenosaunee people to European colonization, but also the ever-mounting anxiety of Europeans about how to selectively incorporate Native souls and economies without incorporating Native sovereignty. The final two chapters look—in ways that suggest the author’s lesser interest in US forms of empire—at the American Revolution and beyond. Kane’s sub-thesis here is that colonialism in North America functioned in much the same way over time, though with a tendency to become more extreme and adamant with the rise of the US. Despite the evidence of greater pressures on the Haudenosaunee, however, Kane is careful to highlight those moments when “communities deployed reworked markers of American material civility to articulate their own sovereignty and political legitimacy” (204).

Throughout all, then, the active, agentic “survivance” of the Haudenosaunee sustains Kane’s book (1). Earlier Kane had tried to suggest a subtle difference between giving “voice to the voiceless” and highlighting those moments that “might yet speak to how [the Haudenosaunee] saw and thought of the changing world” (13). In the end, these two things are much closer in practice than she implies. Certainly, they are closer than either effort is to showing “how and why Indigenous people . . . have been so often rendered anonymous” (13). The latter objective is a more genealogical effort, in a Foucauldian sense, and I’m not sure the mechanisms of erasure trumped the discovery of deliberative Haudenosaunee resistance in Kane’s book. This is not a criticism at all of the author, but rather an observation that the precise differences between social and cultural history—between experience and its narration—are still being worked out when it comes to the study of Indigenous-settler pasts.

Odle’s book, *Under the Skin*, ironically comes closer to a culturalist, or Foucauldian, reading of the sources surrounding adornment, despite the way that it wants to examine “embodied experience” as much as the meaning of that experience (4). *Under the Skin* is a much shorter book than *Shirts Powdered Red*, more concise as well—in some ways slightly too compacted where Kane’s book is slightly too verbose. (Such perceptions of course only appear to a reviewer when comparing directly.) Odle delivers four chapters, two on tattooing and two on scalping. Chapter 1 is a survey of colonial approaches to Native tattooing in the seventeenth

century. It finds mostly paradoxes. For example, when colonists accepted the designs of tattoos as Indigenous signatures on land deeds as legitimate forms of Native communication, they simultaneously, in their very rewriting of them in this way, used Indigenous pictographs to undermine Native land possession. Overall, though, the chapter suggests that recognition eventually gave way to limitation: “English authors increasingly circumscribed . . . their ideas of Indigenous writing in ways that justified colonial expansion” (43). Chapter 2 takes a finer grained view of tattooing into the eighteenth century. More than the former chapter, it settles on paradoxical indeterminacy, reading tattooing as possibly both an erasure and a nod to Native presence. Tattoos were, Odle concludes, “permanent hybridities . . . yet constantly in flux”—an accurate if slightly unsatisfying summary for the historian seeking an arc of change over time (66).

The book’s second half focuses on that more lethal form of corporeal marking—scalping (though Odle notes that this custom, while violent, did not always kill). Chapter 3 identifies how the long seventeenth century saw the custom transform from a Native act of trophy acquisition into a colonial act of both racializing and financializing Indigenous culture. When Native people scalped, in other words, colonists gradually came to see them as more and more repulsive. When colonists scalped, however, they were seen as more and more deserving of land, resources, and self-justification. These twinned outcomes, Odle insists, were part of the “logic of elimination” central to settler colonialism (90). Odle’s final chapter returns us, though, to indeterminacy. It looks at the surprisingly large number of scalping survivor accounts in the eighteenth century. “Survivors both underlined and unsettled the significance attached to this particular act of violence,” Odle writes, “with their bodies telling complicated and overlapping stories”—mainly of savagery, but sometimes this was the so-called savagery of the Native and at other times this was the bloodiness of colonial takeover (110–11).

Throughout, Odle centers on perception—the crafting and transmission of meaning about indelible corporeal actions undertaken in colonial North America—rather than on the materiality of their practices. Given the grisly nature of these actions, this reader at least was reasonably thankful for the emphasis, though I note that it differed somewhat from the author’s original claim to present embodied experience as much as the narratives surrounding it. Unlike Kane, Odle works chiefly in the culturalist mode. That she does not completely own this mode in her introduction raises some questions about the collective understanding of certain approaches in eighteenth-century studies. Likewise, that Kane declares a wariness about tackling Indigenous experience in her work, yet delivers great reflections on it, hints at some lack of clarity about the line between social and cultural analysis in our field.

The success of the two books reviewed here should encourage a lessening of anxiety about correct methodologies when it comes to delineating the finer aspects of early modern settler colonialism. Surely they show, when placed side by side, that we need a greater sense of both the lived and storied past. *Shirts Powdered Red* and *Under the Skin* advance knowledge about each concern, through the unexpected lens of bodily alteration.