

REVIEW

The Indian Lawyer (1990)

James Welch

(1940-2003)

“Sylvester Yellow Calf, the protagonist of *The Indian Lawyer*, is in some ways my favorite Welch hero. Welch has always been bothered by the notion that books about Indians are specialist, regionalist works. It is a kind of patronizing attitude, familiar to the writers of science fiction and other “fringe genres.” This novel is about a contemporary man who happens to be Indian. That is not to say that his Indian background is not important, only that it is no more (or less) important than growing up in Whitemud, Alberta, or being an Italian in New York. Sylvester serves on the Montana state parole board, and he becomes entangled in the personal life of a prisoner, with tragic results. *The Indian Lawyer* is the best of the attempts by American Indian authors to write in the mystery genre, though it is in fact more a mainstream novel with a crime context, not a mystery per se. (The American Indian mystery genre is dominated by white authors, primarily because Indian authors tend not to write to the requirements of the formulae. Linda Hogan’s and Louis Owens’ efforts in this arena are illustrative.”

Mick McAllister
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