



The Background and Inspirations for APACHE

by Tanya Landman



*“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free”*

So reads the famous inscription on the plinth of the Statue of Liberty. America. Land of the Free.

I grew up on a diet of TV westerns, and B movies. *The Little House on the Prairie*, *Alias Smith and Jones*, *Davy Crockett*, *The Virginian*, *Bonanza*, *Rawhide*. They all had one thing in common – a firm belief in the heroism of the plucky settlers who set forth to conquer the wilderness, who went with nothing but their courage to carve out a place for themselves in a hostile world, who carried their honesty and virtue as a force with which to civilize the Wild West. The settlers and cowboys were always the heroes, the Indians (if mentioned at all) were a nasty, savage race that were best avoided. It was a myth I never thought to question.

I remember the seismic shock of watching *Little Big Man* for the first time: of seeing Custer – who I’d been led to believe was a tragically doomed hero – shown as ‘mad, bad and dangerous to know’. Of seeing the Cheyenne – who I’d always taken to be the bad guys – portrayed with sympathy and warmth. A slight shift in cultural perceptions started in the 1970s with the publication of Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Even so, the issue of what had happened to America’s native peoples wasn’t something I came into daily contact with: it is only recently that I’ve realised that it was all swept under the carpet as something no one really wanted to talk about.

Today, if you look up ‘Apache’ on a search engine, you’re more likely to find references to computer software and helicopters than the tribes who lived in Arizona and New Mexico before white settlers colonised their land. Say ‘Winnebago’ and you’re more likely to think of a motorhome than a Nebraskan tribe. ‘Cherokee’ is a clothing label, stocked by Tesco. The haunting photograph of Hattie Tom on the cover of *Apache* is advertised first and foremost as a mousepad. *The Way the West Was Won* is still referred to in glowing, heroic terms.

Astonishingly, Disneyland (Paris) offers a whole themed evening of celebration based on Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show (which was first staged in 1883, six years before the massacre of Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee).

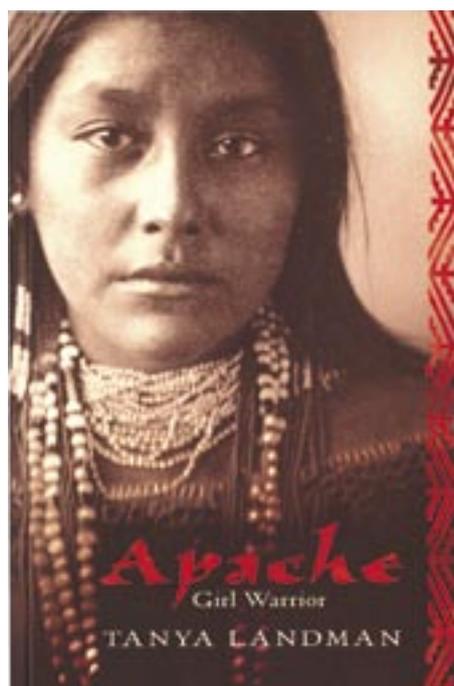
But I was born in Gravesend – where Pocohontas is buried. As a small child, I found her story hauntingly sad. Growing up, I saw her statue on an almost daily basis, and her image, and her story must have lodged somewhere deep in my sub-conscious long before she became the saccharine heroine of an animated film.

A chance remark by my agent sparked off the idea for *Apache*. She said something about warriors and the picture of a girl carrying a spear formed in my mind. The outline of her story came into my head that afternoon. But I wasn’t sure where women fitted in the Native American tribes or how much freedom they had. At that time in history women throughout the world had very little control over their lives so I didn’t know if a girl would have been allowed to become a warrior.

I started research – beginning with Geronimo simply because it was the first name that dropped into my head. I found his autobiography on the web and I was electrified by it. I started reading everything I could find. I knew a little of the Plains tribes

because of films like *Dances with Wolves*, but knew absolutely nothing about the Apache nations. I was gripped by the spirit of the people I read about: their courage and extraordinary abilities; the passion – the spiritual reverence – for the land in which they lived. The more I read, the more I realised that Cochise and Geronimo, Mangas Coloradas and Victorio were the real American heroes, not the cowboys I’d grown up believing in. Then I found references to Lozen – the sister of the chief Victorio – a warrior who rode and fought with Geronimo right up to his final surrender.

I’d also wanted to create a character who betrays his tribe and found Chatto, who became a scout for the US army and was loathed by Geronimo’s band. The more I read, the more I realised that what I’d imagined was entirely plausible. These



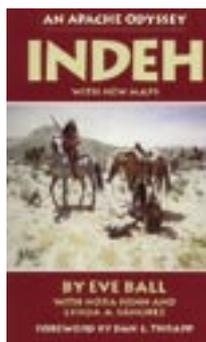
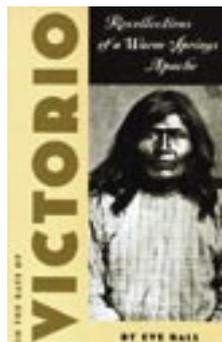


people were extraordinary – proud, disciplined, brave and utterly betrayed by many of those who made their way from the east to the west coast of America.

Anger fuelled the writing of the book. I was gripped with fury about what had been done to the Apache tribes, but I was also dismayed that I had known nothing about these appalling events. In school, I was taught about Hitler’s policy of *Lebensraum* which led him to invade Poland to create more living space for the ‘master race’. But until I started my research, I’d never come across the nightmarish phrase ‘Manifest Destiny’ – used by various presidents and policy makers to justify the relentless expansion of the USA from ‘sea to shining sea’ regardless of the cost to the native population. And it’s a sobering fact to note that citizenship was not granted to Native Americans until the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act was passed.

I read everything I could lay my hands on, and found a linguistic bias in pretty much every history book I came across. For example, the US army engaged in ‘battles’ when they were in fact slaughtering women and children in their tepees. Retaliatory Apache ambushes or raids are ‘depredations’. Warriors are described as ‘renegades’. This kind of moral loading is still prevalent even in recently published works.

But the works of Eve Ball are different. In *Indeh* and *In the Days of Victorio* are first person accounts of events related by members of the Chiricahua Apache nation. In these books, the personalities of those involved shine through – vivid, electrifying, passionate. There are statements so shocking they set my pulse racing: in the



introduction to *In the Days Of Victorio*, for example, James Kawaykla says, “...until I was about ten years old I did not know that people died except by violence.”

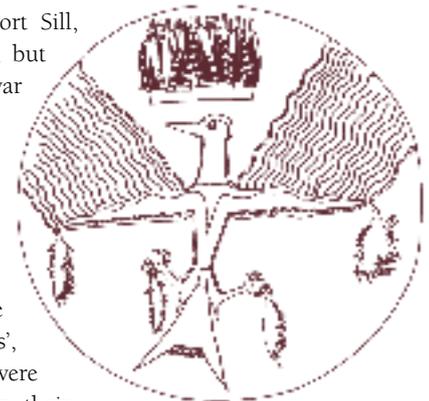
I read with growing indignation of massacres perpetrated by US citizens and by the US army. And I read with an enormous admiration for the spirit of defiance – the indomitable will – of those who fought for their freedom against overwhelming odds.

In 1886, under the leadership of Geronimo, thirty-four men, women and children (including the woman warrior, Lozen) were the last band of free Indians in the United States. This small group of Chiricahua Apaches was pursued by 5000 American troops (nearly one quarter of the entire US army), and 3000 Mexican soldiers.

After their eventual surrender, Geronimo’s band and the rest of the Chiricahua nation (about 500 men, women and children in total) were transported to Florida and held as prisoners of war. Removed from their land, the heart was torn from them. People from the vast open skies of Arizona were held in a place so densely forested that they had to climb trees in order to see the sky. The air was damp and humid, and they were surrounded by malarial swamps. Coming from the arid climate of Arizona they had no resistance to the ‘shaking sickness’. Many died from malaria and TB. Lozen was one of them.

The tribe was moved to Fort Sill, Oklahoma eight years later, but remained as prisoners of war for another nineteen years.

The Chiricahua Apache were captives for a total of twenty seven years. There are no accurate records of population numbers before the start of the ‘Apache Wars’, but it is estimated that there were about 2,000 Chiricahua. On their release in 1913, only 261 remained alive.



Towards the end of his life, in a private meeting with Theodore Roosevelt, Geronimo said, “My hands are tied as if with rope....I pray you to cut the ropes and make me free. Let me die in my own country, an old man who has been punished enough.”

His request was not granted. Geronimo died in 1909 without ever seeing his homeland again.

Apache Written by Tanya Landman
Walker £6.99 ISBN: 978-1406303315

Other books mentioned written by Eve Ball
In the Days of Victorio
University of Arizona Press \$15.95 ISBN: 978-0816504015

Indeh: An Apache Odyssey
University of Oklahoma Press \$24.95 ISBN: 978-0806121659