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Cultural Literacy, First Nations and the Future of Canadian Literary Studies

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First Nations literature presents a variety of challenges to scholars and teachers of Canadian literature to which we have a responsibility to respond. Studying First Nations literature is one means by which we can increase our understanding of and respect for First Peoples and create the political will to involve ourselves in the social justice issues that concern them. In this paper, we discuss the reasons for promoting greater cultural literacy (by which we mean the mainstream becoming acculturated by aboriginal cultures) in Canadian students, and we offer pragmatic suggestions as to how it might be achieved.

La Littérature des premières nations présente une variété de défis aux disciples et aux professeurs de la littérature canadienne auxquels nous avons une responsabilité de répondre. Étudier les premières nations que la littérature est une signifie par de ce que nous pouvons augmenter notre compréhension et le respect pour les premiers peuples et créent la volonté politique de se faire participer dans les issues sociales de justice qui les concernent. En cet article, nous discutons les raisons de favoriser une plus grande instruction culturelle (par ce que nous voulons dire devenir de courant principal acculturated par les cultures indigènes) dans les étudiants canadiens, et offrir pragmatique suggestion quant comment pouvoir réaliser.

The more you know, the more you will trust, and the less you will fear.[1]

First Nations present the national government and culture in Canada with a challenge; in fact, the kind of federation Canada will be in the future depends on how this issue is resolved. In this paper, we argue that Canadian literary critics have a responsibility to find ways of responding to First Nations literature and promoting the cultural literacy of Canadian readers. Because First Nations literature represents a fundamental challenge to constructions of fields of literary studies or canons of texts organized by nation-state, we struggle to understand how the concept of "nations within," as well as the ongoing debates about Canadian unity, constitutional crisis and aboriginal self-government, reconfigure national literature in particular, and national identity in general.

The urgency and importance of these issues call for a sophisticated approach to subjects pertaining to aboriginal peoples. For this reason, and because the position of the earth's aboriginal peoples will continue to be an urgent social issue in the twenty-first century, Canadian academics, along with politicians and other policy makers, have a responsibility not only to attend to the concerns of First Nations in Canada

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but also to involve themselves in the work of decolonization. Scholars and teachers of Canadian literature turn our attention to literary writing by First Nations peoples as one sphere in which such political action takes place.

I: The Paradox of (In)Visibility

Histories concerned with the colonization and settlement on which Canada is built are necessarily replete with references to aboriginal peoples, but such accounts rarely deal with the history *of* First Peoples, leading Bruce Trigger to call for a historical understanding of "native people in terms of their own beliefs and perceptions" (436). Whereas the erasure of "the Native" as the dying and disappearing "Indian" in American culture betrays, in Louis Owens's words, "an unmistakable yearning to *be* Indian" (31) and inspires the romantic nationalist moments in English-Canadian literature identified by Margery Fee, the erasure of "the Native" in Canada has more often been signified by absence and forgetting. Paradoxically, First Peoples are an (in)visible presence in the Canadian mainstream, including the official history most of us learned in school – *there* but seldom represented except in relation to the dominant culture – a position in which "the Native" signifies the abject, pushed to the fringes of consciousness and the edge of town.

Yet certain images of aboriginal peoples have become highly visible in national politics and culture in the past three decades. This new visibility can be attributed in part to a reawakening of aboriginal cultures in North America. Publications such as *Aboriginal Voices*, publishing companies such as Theytus Books, popular musicians such as Susan Aglukark and television shows such as "North of 60" have become household words in mainstream Canadian culture, and aboriginal images have appeared as logo to such national events as the Calgary Olympics – while the Lubicon Cree protested outside. Even more pervasive has been the popularization of Native imagery as part of the New Age pseudo-spirituality that Beth Brant criticizes in this passage:

> This religion has no specific dogma or doctrine other than heavy reliance on paraphernalia and language, some of it "borrowed" from Indigenous cultures ... drumming and dancing are required, feathers are worn, "names" are given, lots of hugging and getting in touch with feelings. (25-27)

Brant describes the appropriation of "Native spirituality" to these ends as a quest for "some anodyne to a cold and loveless society" (27), and she concludes that "the new-age is merely the old-age – capitalism cloaked in mystic terminology, dressed in robes and skins of ancient and Indigenous beliefs" (27-28).

What Brant signals in her remarks is the extent to which raids made on aboriginal cultures reflect both the disintegration of western traditions and the steadfast

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resistance to those traditions by aboriginal peoples that makes them a valid alternative. The popularity of "The Native" in the mainstream has become part of the search for a purer, authentic alternative to the delegitimized, spiritually and intellectually exhausted western culture as, according to Charles Taylor, "people insecure in their identities turn to all sorts of self-appointed experts and guides, shrouded with the prestige of science or some exotic spirituality" (*Ethics* 15). In academic contexts, the decentering of western thought by postmodernist and poststructuralist theories, especially the so-called "crisis of legitimation" in the humanities, has contributed much to that exhaustion. In popular culture, the most visible sign of a search for fresh alternatives (to which Taylor seems to refer here) can be seen in the appropriation of Native images, symbols and stories by New Age spirituality and by some white writers. The pervasiveness of this practice ignited a debate on cultural appropriation in which non-aboriginal writers have been confronted by aboriginal writers, as when Lee Maracle asked Anne Cameron to "move over" and stop using Native stories in her work.[2]

Whether it is, as Joel Monture argues, because the popularity of all things Native crests every 20 years or so (121), or for the reasons described below, discourses ranging from the popular media to statements of public policy are infused with the representation of First Peoples as part of a multicultural Canada. In government documents, news reports or advertisements, images of "The Native" are highly visible in Canadian public discourse, yet the heightened public presence of Native imagery has not ensured serious engagement with First Nations issues. When Canada wears Native icons as logos, it is supposed to signify the inclusiveness of multicultural identity, yet to say that ambivalence characterizes both the historical celebration and neglect of First Peoples in Canada would probably be an understatement.[3]

The paradox of aboriginal (in)visibility in Canadian culture stems from ignorance of the particular cultures and histories to which aboriginal images refer. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that Canadians have been educated in a collective forgetting. A study of 200 Toronto-area schools conducted between 1993 and 1994 by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association showed that students were ignorant of the history of racism in Canada (*The Globe and Mail* 25 September 1995 A3). In an illustration of the connection between Canada as an imagined nation and the national forgetting of history, especially pertaining to First Peoples, *The Globe and Mail* tested its readers' awareness of aboriginal history by reprinting the "Aboriginality Quiz" from *Windspeaker*, an aboriginal publication from Edmonton, significantly, on Canada Day. The question posed by such research is how Canadians can understand the current political context if they do not share common knowledge of historical events. The absence of information about First Peoples may account for the population's ignorance and continued stereotyping as well as the erosion of aboriginal traditions and self-esteem.

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While aboriginal communities have not been silent, their concerns have not been heard. Almost 20 years ago, in 1982, an urgent call for action on aboriginal issues was made at the First Ministers Conference. To date, the federal government has made only one official response to the release of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the apology delivered by Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart. While the election of the Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine captured front-page attention in 1997, outgoing Chief Ovide Mercredi tried to live down Prime Minister Chrétien's refusal to meet with him.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is the latest and most comprehensive in a long line of government studies on aboriginal issues. From 1965 to 1992, close to 900 reports on public policy regarding aboriginal peoples were conducted by federal, provincial and local governments, as well as by other non-governmental and aboriginal organizations (Graham et al. xi). These reports deal with the areas identified by the Royal Commission as the "four pillars" on which a new relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples should be built: "treaties; governance; lands and resources; economic development" (Vol II, 2). Throughout the report, education is identified as the tool that will be used to lay these foundations. In the past 30 years, aboriginal control of education has increased as a result of a shift in public policy away from justifying government policies affecting aboriginal communities to listening to what those communities have to say. For example, in 1990, after a government of British Columbia study found that "3% of the Native population pursue post-secondary training compared to 15% of the general population" (69), a number of bridging programmes emerged, and aboriginal enrollment is rising slowly.[4] Such developments followed from listening to the representatives of aboriginal communities and emphasizing the partnership of First Nations and governments. Yet it should be noted that at first, their voices, too, fell on deaf ears.

The failure of the public to listen is exemplified in the scant attention paid to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and suggests that, by and large, Canadians prefer aboriginal peoples to remain invisible or even imaginary. Indeed, one of the reasons for this article is the need to address the substance of the report, which the report itself calls for, and to understand how education can create the political will in individuals to transform the status quo. The report makes a series of concrete recommendations, and although it is not universally endorsed by all aboriginal peoples – it is hard to imagine any report that would satisfy that requirement – it places the recommendations in the context of the issues facing aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in Canada, specifically the demand for political and cultural recognition by aboriginal peoples. The published highlights of the report include calls for collective action on aboriginal issues, including "bridge-building" (*People* 121) and "alerting mainstream institutions to their responsibilities

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to Aboriginal people" (*People* 61). In other words, the recognition of aboriginal peoples involves participation in political dialogue within state institutions. As James Tully demonstrates in *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*, the politics of recognition continues the work of both anti-imperial and constitutional politics by moving towards the inclusion of diverse cultures on their members' own terms. Political and cultural recognition depends on dialogue, argues Tully, and dialogue requires not only listening to all the voices but also listening to the *languages* in which they speak. Hence, the "politics of recognition," to be effective, requires "decolonization of the mind." Throughout the report, the commissioners stress the importance of education in the work of decolonization, especially in educating the "public mind" (*People* 18). The educational reform called for involves two phases: ensuring that aboriginal peoples control education in their own communities and involving the mainstream in "a broad and creative campaign of public education" (*People* 144). University teachers have a part to play in this campaign.

While Canadian society looks to aboriginal societies for what Canadian society lacks, the changes brought to traditional aboriginal cultures by modernity have resulted in losses and fears not unlike those suffered in western societies. In his thoughtful exploration of contact in Ojibway and Cree communities, *Dancing With a Ghost*, Rupert Ross observes "a large measure of uncertainty, disagreement and fear, fed by a concern that the circle [of family, community and spirituality] may be irreparably broken already, the future nothing but a question mark" (133). The connection with the past has been ruptured by the creation of reservations, the relocation of people to urban centres and other changes in lifestyle. In the wake of this social upheaval, Ross observes, aboriginal peoples fear "a double disintegration, with both the group and the individual falling into an unconnected and meaningless existence" (140).

Presuming that in pre-contact times, "each hunter-gatherer may have had more opportunities for achieving an expanded sense of self than most of us will ever know" (92), Ross concludes that the radical changes brought by contact have led to a loss of "individual freedom of choice" (107). In other words, aboriginal societies are experiencing the feeling of being "unconnected to either a familiar past or future" (Ross 91), the very "malaise of modernity" that drives western societies to seek rejuvenating alternatives. Studies of modern identity such as Charles Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity* (also published as *The Malaise of Modernity*) describe how a similar sense of loss characterizes the very societies that have colonized aboriginal peoples. Although the responses to these cultural phenomena differ in aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities, the symptoms they face and the observations made by the most thoughtful commentators on these issues contain striking similarities.

In his essay "Aboriginal Epistemology," aboriginal scholar Willie Ermine criticizes the atomism of contemporary culture that Taylor describes and the fragmentation of

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knowledge resulting from it (103). According to Taylor, "we" feel disconnected from ourselves and others because modern society has gone over to the "dark side of individualism" (*Ethics* 4), that is, to the unrestrained pursuit of self-fulfilment. "It seems true," observes Taylor, "that the culture of self-fulfilment has led many people to lose sight of concerns that transcend them" (*Ethics* 15). Ermine argues that western scientific method has fostered that atomism by seeking to describe the physical world objectively, that is, by viewing it as separate from ourselves (102-03). Aboriginal epistemology, he asserts, takes a different approach by defining knowledge as "experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge itself. The experience is knowledge" (104), and "culture" is the accumulation of this knowledge (105).

Taylor presents the culture of self-fulfilment as a travesty of authentic selfhood because the "moral ideal behind self-fulfilment is that of being true to oneself, in a specifically modern understanding of that term" (*Ethics* 15), yet the "centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poor in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (*Ethics* 4). Ironically, this search for self-fulfilment underpins the exploitative celebration of other cultures by individuals. The prevailing ethical relativism that accompanies these events, the "liberalism of neutrality," offers no defense against this conflict between self-fulfilment and the rights of others.

In academic settings, liberal neutrality causes intellectuals to refuse comment on issues affecting people who differ from them on the grounds that such commentary would constitute a form of cultural appropriation. Linda Alcoff describes this as the "retreat position" in her essay "The Problem of Speaking for Others," arguing that, although this position emerges from concern over appropriation without regard for the ownership of cultural property, its effect is to allow the most privileged members of society to abdicate responsibility for the power differential that subjugates racial, ethnic and cultural others. As the highlights of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples notes, "remaining passive and silent is not neutrality – it is support for the status quo" (*People* 126). Indeed, the retreat or neutral position has a negative impact on the real status of First Peoples in Canada by ensuring their (in)visibility.

II: Cultural Literacy

In contrast, we suggest challenging the status quo by using the views of culture and knowledge offered by aboriginal thinkers to redefine "cultural literacy." The term "cultural literacy," with its taint of right-wing conservatism, joined the academic mainstream with the publication of E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Should Know* in 1987. In his study, Hirsch addresses the reproduction of

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disenfranchisement and class segregation in the United States (significantly, he does not discuss the position of Native Americans). Although that history differs markedly from Canadian history, his critique of educational methods and his general definition of "cultural literacy" as "the network of information that all competent readers possess" (2) offers a glimpse of education's role in maintaining inequalities of power.[5] Perhaps Hirsch's most important insight is his recognition that current educational practice constitutes an episteme, thus making alternate epistemes possible.

Often viewed along with Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* as one of the best-selling "jeremiads" (Readings 1 and *passim*) of a neoconservative backlash against multiculturalism, Hirsch's study stresses the importance of literacy to maintaining national culture and suggests, that communities, in this case nations, are constituted through communication. There are several well-founded arguments dismissing Hirsch's conclusions, including the one Bill Readings makes in *The University in Ruins*. Readings argues that, because the "nation-state is no longer the major site at which capital reproduces itself," the criteria of literacy do not refer to national culture, and therefore Hirsch's analogy between reading and national culture is false (15-16). Readings's analysis also uncouples "culture" and "nation" so that we are reminded that the same debate has taken place outside the United States; indeed, in Canada, it has been waged in regards to university curricula in particular.[6]

The analysis of cultural literacy may have come too late for the nation-state, but the symptoms of cultural shift and stress it sought to address are no less real for that. As Christopher Lasch has remarked: "The right talks about breakdown and crisis, the left about pluralism and diversity. The right does not offer a convincing explanation of the problem, let alone a convincing solution, but at least it acknowledges the problem's existence ..." (180). Cultural literacy as "back to basics" or "teaching the canon" – as its appropriation by proponents of the "common sense revolution" suggests – is not a "convincing solution" because the information people share is constantly changing to reflect the pluralism of national life. Promoting "cultural literacy" means teaching the information needed to live in a multicultural society that is constantly evolving. In Canada, this means tackling one of the central facts of Canadian experience: the territorial appropriation of First Peoples that shaped the nation into its present-day form.

The term "cultural literacy" has broader applications in this context of cross-cultural contact. For one thing, it presupposes the existence of "cultural illiteracy," the inability to read and communicate cultural codes. This inability characterizes the history of misunderstanding in Canada's relations with First Peoples. Placing Hirsch's term in the context of Canadian literary study necessarily changes it by removing Canadian literature from its marginalized position in the American

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debate and by recognizing the marginal voices speaking to it.[7] Moreover, the "civilizing mission" (Gates 18) to convert disenfranchised members to full participants in the dominant culture leaves the dominant culture unchanged, whereas the use made of the term here concerns the transformation of the dominant, national culture through education.

Intellectuals have to address the cynical fragmentation of our culture if only because the right finds it such fertile soil for their seeds of discontent. As Michael Keefer observes in *Lunar Perspectives: Field Notes from the Culture Wars*, the "common culture" lamented in neo-conservative jeremiads is not "common" at all: it is exclusive (206). Analyzing the issues that constitute the battleground for the culture wars in Canada, Keefer demonstrates how media hysteria has allowed the neoconservative agenda to dominate and to produce the "violently paranoid language" (vii) which, although not justified by actual events, drowns out the "wry, thoughtful, ironic" voices that respond (4). While affirmative action is the flashpoint for the debate in the United States, Keefer argues, in Canada, class is the main issue, as the neo-conservative agenda for education serves "to reinforce rather than to make permeable the boundaries between social classes" (35). Yet, in Canada, class and race are wound together. The important fact Keefer raises is that, in both cases, the attack on "political correctness" is a vote for the status quo of inequity while the polarization and escalation of the debate (as "war") prevents rational consideration of political issues and engenders cynicism. It turns First Nations into noisy "interest groups" rather than independent polities; it turns consideration of matters of collective importance into "trendy subjects"; it turns opposition to the status quo into "political correctness."

From the liberal point of view, political correctness is the ultimate bogeyman because it is not a position based on *free choice* by autonomous individuals, and, in the culture of the unrestrained pursuit of self-fulfilment, access to free choice is the only moral value. Political correctness as the absence of judgement and the application of political dogma to a situation is, therefore, at best, an amoral practice. Rather, those who argue for recognition do so on moral as well as political grounds. While a moral position requires the adjudication of motives and intentions of the agent, the concept of political correctness does not. Therefore, the charge of political correctness levied against those who raise concerns about gender, racial and other forms of difference by conservatives is designed to reduce a debate of rational arguments to a clash of divergent beliefs. The identification of a position as "politically correct" is a form of "false consciousness," or a mode that "both illuminates and misrepresents" (MacIntyre 206), showing us where there is smoke but not how to put out the fire.

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III: Responsible Advocacy

The "culture wars" that pit political correctness against academic freedom concern two different ideals of the function education has in society. Those accused of political correctness often act as advocates for certain issues while those who occupy the opposite pole feign neutrality. That education assimilates students to mainstream society cannot be denied, but what is the role of university teachers in *redefining* the mainstream? Is there a role for non-Native teachers of Canadian literature in the advancement of aboriginal concerns? Are there legitimate justifications for studying subjects pertaining to aboriginal peoples? While the public's interest in aboriginal cultures seems to reflect the search for alternatives to the alienation at the core of late twentieth-century experience, the current academic interest issues from the confluence of theoretical and political concerns, including the so-called crisis in representation and institutional authority and the decentering and deconstructing impulses left by post-structuralism. If nothing else, the concentration on the "self" or the "subject" in modern times has resulted in the realization that teachers cannot speak as neutral voices, that they have convictions and opinions that influence how they do their jobs.

In this sense, teachers in the humanities are engaging with the problem of speaking for others. As intellectuals who study subjects relating to cultural others, such as anthropologists, come to grips with the complexity of speaking for others, they have turned to participatory action as an ethical means of research. As Julie Cruikshank remarks, "researchers recognize that they can no longer claim the role of giving voice to or speaking on behalf of other cultural perspectives" ("The Politics" 141). By making this choice, researchers working in disciplines such as anthropology offer up their former scientific objectivity and neutrality to an emphasis on responsibility and advocacy.

To some extent, the role of the teacher is necessarily an advocate's role.[8] Recognizing that academic freedom entails responsibility, many teachers realize that "advocacy in the classroom is inevitable, in the sense that normative judgements about the subject matter are unavoidably included in the learning encounter" (Brand 8). When we say that teachers "have a responsibility" to take up these issues, we are working within a specifically western, or a specifically non-aboriginal, concept of how people should act. That is, as individuals belonging to Canadian society, we feel a need to do something about the injustice to First Peoples; thus, we make an *ethical* argument concerning *political* action. That is not to say that we feel *entitled* to speak on behalf of First Peoples – quite the contrary – even though the line between speaking *about* and speaking *for* is always permeable. Such feelings may come from guilt or from what Lynette Hunter calls critical embarrassment, but they issue in the kind of advocacy our "interventionist" culture supports.

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"Knowledge of one another, and a sharing of wisdom," the highlights of the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples states, "are essential to a true partnership of people" (*People* 89). But what form should that sharing take? The answer to that question will depend on what the role of literature in collective life is considered to be. In *Poetic Justice*, Martha Nussbaum argues that "[t]he literary imagination is part of public rationality" because it is "an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own" (xvi). On her account, reading and understanding literature by aboriginal writers should be integral to the concept of justice that the report calls for; and this is especially true in the case of literature written by First Nations writers because, as Janice Acoose argues, "Indigenous writers positively and knowledgeably construct aspects of their cultures that have been previously misrepresented by outsiders who knew little about the cultures about which they wrote" (31), they provide the literary imagination with the information necessary to make justice achievable.[9]

Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish a broad thematic meaning of "cultural literacy" from what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls the "civilizing mission" of its popularizer, E.D. Hirsch (18). To his credit, Hirsch recognizes that the education of children is a kind of anthropological allegory, that is, in which "primitives" (children) and America's disenfranchised (the poor) are strange, exotic cultures. From the social and anthropological perspectives, Hirsch argues, the "basic goal of education in a human community is acculturation" (xvi). Indeed, in negative terms, assimilation and acculturation were the rationale for the residential schooling of aboriginal peoples. Inverting the process so that the mainstream becomes acculturated *by* aboriginal cultures changes the meaning of cultural literacy. If the basic goal of education is the acculturation of children then the content of education is assimilation, but recent surveys show that what Canadian children are assimilated to differs radically. As the appropriation of aboriginal cultures is made visible through greater cultural literacy, resistance to the acculturation of First Peoples and a shared culture that is different from the one we have now, a new one based on better knowledge of aboriginal cultures will emerge.

At present, literature by First Peoples is taught as part of mainstream Canadian content. There is no question of including it as a new literature in the canon – that has already happened. Instead, there is a need to address the relationship of First Peoples and their cultures to mainstream culture by addressing what it means to exist in relation to the Canadian state for differently positioned peoples, and, in so doing, to transform the status quo, that is, to address the implications they have for the mainstream. Commenting on the American literary context, Kimberly M. Blaeser observes:

> The battle for inclusion in the canon of World Literature has to do with more than having your writing sandwiched between Norman Mailer and Joan

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> Didion in some publisher's collection. If Indian literature is not included in the canon of American letters, if it is not read and studied in our colleges as legitimate literature, then Native peoples remain invisible in society, and the teaching in our grade schools and high schools will not improve. (36)

"We want quality attention," she continues, "we want the influences of tribal literature and world literature recognized" (36).

Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm describes the reader's role in this recognition as a "responsibility to join the circle humbly, to listen actively, to accept responsibility, to become more informed, to recognize our complacency, to face our pasts, to remember, to confront the vestiges of imperialist thought" ("Dispelling" 113). Before teachers and students join that circle, however, they need to have knowledge of the particular historical and cultural contexts represented. For teachers, this is the "challenge inherent in any process of cross-cultural translation: to make the 'other' comprehensible without erasing its difference" (Couser 23). To that end, Native American scholar Jana Sequoya calls for a "convergence – which does not, however, comprise an identity – of indigenous and Western epistemes" (qtd. in Krupat, *Ethnocriticism* 185). Achieving such a convergence of different epistemes might contribute to a more inclusive university. Yet it is also important to ask, as Arnold Krupat reminds us, if "the call to polyphony quite literally intends not so much the inclusion of the Indian point of view but its adoption as one's own" (*Voice* 9).

IV. Decolonizing Literary Studies

Canadian universities remain colonial institutions, dominated by non-aboriginal students and teachers and structured according to discourses and practices whose origins are in western Europe.[10] Historically, First Nations people have found Canadian universities to be rather unwelcome places, yet the decolonization of mainstream institutions requires their participation in them as students, faculty, administrators and non-academic staff. As Blaeser implies, institutional recognition and inclusion of First Peoples is a necessary precursor to decolonization. Achieving a greater First Nations presence in universities is complicated by several factors, not the least of which are the consequences experienced by both individuals and communities when aboriginal peoples living in remote areas necessarily leave their homes to work or study at urban universities. As Rupert Ross observes, from an aboriginal point of view, the loss of any individual means a loss for the community as a whole. Aboriginal peoples who do leave their homes often experience profound loneliness, as well as a sense of guilt for having deserted their families and abandoned their responsibilities to their communities (127-29). These feelings can be understood as a characteristic of aboriginal identity, which is partly a function of an individual's

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relatedness to others, but it can also be understood in the historical context of the removal of aboriginal children from their homes and their placement in residential schools, as well as the continuing lack of educational and employment opportunities that would encourage young people to stay. White children are raised to leave home and to live independently, and for many going away to university is an important rite of passage into adulthood. By contrast, aboriginal children are raised to feel a strong and continuing sense of responsibility to family and community (Ross 128). When aboriginal people do enter universities, they find themselves in inhospitable environments structured according to foreign values that shape every aspect of their experience of the education system, from the physical design of classrooms to the information written in course textbooks to the emphasis on education as an exclusively intellectual pursuit (Monture-Angus 83-84). They are also the frequent objects of overt racism.

First Nations scholars working in Canadian universities also report feelings of ambivalence about being there: they learn how to succeed in a western institution in order to work from within it, but they are also concerned about how their academic work intersects or conflicts with their identities as aboriginal people. Untenable professional situations are common. Called upon to be insider experts on all things Native, they can simultaneously be dismissed because of their so-called "biased" views. Métis scholar Emma LaRocque explains:

> If we serve as "informants" to our non-Native colleagues, for example, about growing up within a land-based culture (e.g., on a trap line), our colleagues would include such information as part of their scholarly presentations; it would authenticate their research. Yet, if we use the very same information with a direct reference to our cultural backgrounds, it would be met, at best, with scepticism, and, at worst, with charges of parochialism because we have spoken in "our own voices." ("Colonization" 12-13)

LaRocque situates herself among other First Nations intellectuals working to deconstruct the colonial framework of the university. In her view, this means challenging entrenched conventions of scholarship by "maintaining orality in writing, taking an interdisciplinary approach to genre, calling for ethical re/considerations (not to be confused with 'censorship') in the archiving of hate material, and openly (rather than covertly) referring to 'voice' within academic studies" ("Colonization" 13). Such work, and the challenge it represents to western methods and approaches to scholarship, has not yet been adequately attended to by mainstream academics.

Notably, few First Nations students and faculty are involved in literature programmes. The failure of English departments to teach First Nations literature is surely one explanation for this absence. As William E. Pinar comments, the curriculum is a racial text in that it constitutes a certain image of culture. Pinar's argument – that

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African-Americans are part of a pluralist American national culture and that works by and about African-Americans should be incorporated into curricula – cannot simply be transposed onto the situation of First Nations within Canada, however, since many First Peoples do not identify themselves as Canadians, or not only as Canadians, but as members of aboriginal nations.[11] The situation in Canada is more complicated than such pluralist models of curriculum permit. Yet, as Heather Murray (following George Grant) notes, the education system, as it is delivered through university curricula, tends to reproduce fundamental political and economic relations (125). Despite fears of impending takeovers by politically motivated "special interest" groups, Canadian university English curricula are organized much as they have been since the institutional shift towards the valorization over rhetoric that Henry A. Hubert shows occurred in the latter part of the nineteenth century: that is, in terms of western-defined literary genres, the traditional historical periods of British literature and surveys of other national literatures, especially American and Canadian. The centrality of British literature betrays continuing filial ties to Britain, and Canadian literature remains relatively marginal; indeed, it is possible for students to earn an Honours degree in English at some Canadian universities without ever taking a course in Canadian literature. Not surprisingly, undergraduate courses on First Nations literature barely register in surveys of what is being taught in English departments across Canada.[12] As Murray reminds us, curriculum is not just a function of content; rather, "[curriculum] is something that we do" (135). It is part of the process of culture-making. In that sense, "... the final test of the worth of the curriculum will always be its responsiveness and responsibility to the society in which we live, a society conceived in the fullest and most general sense" (Murray 130-31). The social value of English curricula at Canadian universities hinges, in part, on acknowledging the presence and cultural activity of First Peoples – not so as to dismantle English studies but so as to reshape them.

Until very recently, First Nations literature was not read *as* literature; rather, it was read as myth or folklore and relegated to anthropology departments. First Nations students who are enrolled in English programmes, then, will not always find literature that speaks to their realities on course syllabi. This neglect is directly linked to issues of recognition and self-esteem. In "The Politics of Recognition," Charles Taylor argues that "due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (26). Moreover, because recognition is a function of identity formation, "nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (25). While First Nations students of literature will undoubtedly encounter images of themselves in literary texts, those images are most often created by non-aboriginal writers. Including First Nations authors in the English curriculum validates aboriginal world-views and permits a range of images of First Peoples and their

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cultures to be studied in relation to one another. To continue to ignore or devalue the literary work of First Peoples is to deprive ourselves and others of a literature that is rich in aesthetic, philosophical and political terms. It is also, as Arnold Krupat observes, to guarantee our own "irrelevance to any attempt both to understand the world and to change it" (*Voice* 4).

No consensus has been reached as to how the teaching of First Nations literature should be accomplished, however. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommends the establishment of The Aboriginal Peoples International University, which, presumably, would develop its own ways of studying literature. Such a proposal implicitly calls attention to the general failure of Canadian universities to adequately study the contributions of First Peoples, and offers one solution to the low enrolment rates of aboriginal students in post-secondary institutions. The creation of a separate Aboriginal university, however, would not foster the decolonization of mainstream universities or the transformation of mainstream Canadian culture that is needed.

Several Canadian universities have well-established Native Studies programmes where literature forms an integral part of the curriculum.[13] Yet Native Studies programmes, while undoubtedly valuable because of the intense focus they bring to Native topics (as well as the fact that they often employ First Nations professors), do not always have sufficient impact either on the shape of the university or on the acculturation of all Canadians. They raise the problem of ghettoization whereby Native subjects are figured as special topics for special – and, by implication few – students. Addressing this problem from her perspective as a writer, Emma LaRocque comments that "The lumping of our writing under the category 'Native' means that our discussion of issues and ideas that are universally applicable may not reach the general public" ("Preface" xviii). Segregating First Nations literature, she continues, also has a potentially deleterious effect on writers, for it raises doubts about the merit of their work and provokes the question, "Is our writing published because we are good writers or because we are Native?" ("Preface" xix).

Ghettoizing literature by First Nations authors in Native Studies programmes also limits students' access to it, whereas the inclusion of First Nations materials at various points in the curriculum is the method by which Canadian students can best be acculturated by aboriginal cultures. A multifaceted approach to curriculum design is probably most desirable. First-year English courses, for example, could be designed as world literature courses, structured not according to nations or historical periods but according to different treatments of common themes. Supposedly universal themes such as the development of the child or the relationship between individuals and their societies, for example, could be shown to have meanings that speak to particular cultural values and traditions. Introductory courses are also the place where students acquire critical reading and writing skills

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along with the appropriate vocabulary with which to discuss literary texts. In the kind of introductory course we imagine, students would be taught that formal matters, such as genre, plot design, characterization and language use also refer to specific cultural traditions.

As noted above, First Nations literature has, in some cases, been integrated into Canadian literature courses as part of a multicultural vision of the canon. Yet we must avoid assimilating First Peoples to an abstract, post-modern national identity made up of diverse constituent communities. The fact that many writers may not define themselves as Canadian is a significant complicating factor that undermines a pluralist formulation of the nationalist canon. While the Canadian literary canon has historically made space for cultural difference, that difference is generally assumed to have been imported from elsewhere.[14] Literature by First Peoples, on the other hand, represents an otherness that both pre-exists mainstream Euro-Canadian literature and survives in spite of its dominance. Indeed, literature by First Peoples does not necessarily refer to mainstream culture at all; thus, it refuses incorporation into an ever-expanding literary canon and forces readers to recognize the continuity of a specifically aboriginal literary tradition. It also requires that readers take seriously Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm's assertion that: "... *[Native people] are fundamentally different from anyone else in this land, fundamentally different from Canadians. The basis of this difference is the land, our passion for it and our understanding of our relationship with it*" ("We Belong" 21, emphasis in the original).

Where faculty resources permit, specialized courses in First Nations literature offer a more detailed and wide-ranging contextualization of literary works within the particular histories and cultural traditions from which they emerge. Some historical contextualization is always necessary, for without this information students will be unable to understand allusions in literary texts to key figures and events that constitute First Nations history.[15] Students also need to know something about the cultural traditions in which the literatures are embedded.[16] Even the most fundamental issues, such as the place of art and the role of the artist in society, require careful explanation. First Nations artists and writers do not necessarily view their work as distinct from other expressions of social and political activity. As Gitskan artist Doreen Jensen puts it, "In my language, there is no word for 'Art.' This is not because we are devoid of Art, but because Art is so powerfully integrated with all aspects of life, we are replete with it" (17). First Nations artists and writers see themselves as grounded in and accountable to their communities, not as isolated individuals who are detached observers of their societies, which has become the dominant image of the artist in western culture. This difference explains why Maria Campbell expresses a certain ambivalence about the title "writer" (Interview 41). To Campbell and many other First Peoples, the work that they do is community work, and they see themselves as cultural activists.

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The nature, uses and effects of language are also issues that First Nations writers treat differently, as Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong explains:

> When we consider the spiritual place from which our thinking arises, the words become sacred things because they come from that place. My responsibility is to strive for correctness in my presentation, correctness of purpose and accuracy in my use of words in my attempt to transcend the simple actuality of the things I have seen, to the image of those same things in the context of my entire history and the sacred body of knowledge that we, as a people, have acquired. ("Words" 28)

First Nations writers may recognize the ambiguity of language and the difficulty of conveying meaning through language, but they also recognize that words are one powerful medium through which cultural knowledge is passed on. Aboriginal literature is the repository of that knowledge. It is in the literature, Basil Johnston explains, that "the essence and the substance of tribal ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, values, beliefs, theories, notions, sentiments, and accounts of their institutions and rituals and ceremonies" can be found (13). The fact that First Nations writers are now using English and other non-aboriginal languages does not necessarily mean that such tribal-based ideas of language are not present in the literature. Nor does it represent a break with traditional theories of language that focus on the power of language to generate meanings. Courses that are devoted to the study of First Nations languages and literatures would facilitate this kind of in-depth analysis of aboriginal concepts of writing and language.

Where one locates expertise is a question that underlies all analyses of texts by First Nations writers. Whether or not it is appropriate to bring western literary theories, which are based on western literatures and authorized by the western academy, to bear on First Nations literatures is an issue under examination. Although it is no longer necessarily the case that critics tend to read First Nations literature as a primitive or impure version of western literature, nor is it the case that critics have adequately equipped themselves to read First Nations texts on their own terms. Even radical theoretical approaches and methodologies, such as post-colonialism, which would seem to share much in common with First Nations writers' political concerns, are regarded by some with suspicion. Lee Maracle, commenting on the place of Native literatures in post-colonial literary studies, observes that "even here we are still a classic colony. Our words, our sense and use of language are not judged by the poetry and stories we create. They are judged by the standards set by others" ("Post-Colonial" 13).

Different conceptions of the form and function of theory account for some of the difficulty. In her essay "Oratory: Coming to Theory," Maracle argues that western theory erases the human, whereas First Peoples "humanize theory by fusing

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humanity's need for common direction – theory – with story" (89). From a First Nations perspective, as Willie Ermine's view of aboriginal epistemology also suggests, theory is never abstract; it is grounded in human experience *and* human action. "We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing," writes Maracle, "doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people" (87). Foreign theory, imposed from without and often in an alien and alienating jargon, is not only inadequate to the task of explaining aboriginal perceptions of the relation between language and reality, but it can also enact another form of oppression. Blaeser takes a hard-line approach when she says that "The insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest" ("Native" 55). For writers and critics such as Blaeser and Maracle, while they might recognize that particular western-based theories of reading and writing can be useful (such as Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism or Walter J. Ong's work on orality), the urgent task is to formulate analytical strategies and lexicons that are grounded in aboriginal world-views. Blaeser argues for "tribal-centred criticism" ("Native" 53) and asks others to join her in being "alert for critical methods and voices that seem to arise out of the literature itself (this as opposed to critical approaches applied from an already established critical language or attempts to make the literature fit already established genres and categories of meaning)" ("Native" 53-54).

And yet First Nations writers are not necessarily working strictly within tribal traditions. On the contrary, as Blaeser acknowledges, contemporary writers exist between tribal and mainstream cultures, between oral and written traditions, between European and aboriginal languages and are often "in physical fact mixed-bloods" ("Native" 56). First Nations literatures may be rooted in tribal traditions and values, but they also draw on the genres and forms of western literature and speak to a contemporary reality that is hybrid. Tribal-centred criticism, a criticism that highlights those aspects of the literature that are "traditional," can, for some writers, be equally constraining. Arguing this point, Marilyn Dumont offers the timely reminder that "there is a continuum of exposure to traditional experience in native culture, some of us have been more exposed to it than others, but this does not mean that those who have been more exposed to it are somehow more Indian" (47). James Ruppert suggests that Native American literature "is patterned by discursive acts of mediation at many levels. By mediation, I mean an artistic and conceptual standpoint, constantly flexible, which uses the epistemological frameworks of Native American and Western cultural traditions to illuminate and enrich each other" (7). Furthermore, notes Ruppert, contemporary Native writers write with an awareness of multiple audiences, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal.

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By reading the literature, all students will acquire significant information about the First Nations that will enhance their cultural literacy. In a different context, Blaeser notes the transformative effect of literacy: "Literacy is more than it purports to be, more than merely reading and writing; it is a way of thinking, a world view. Thus, learning another's language is learning another way of seeing the world, and transforming language is also a means of transforming culture" ("Learning" 231). Reversing the process, encouraging the literacy of non-aboriginal students in aboriginal language acts (including aboriginal uses of European languages) represents a similar revision of culture, but this time of the mainstream. And yet there are limits to what classroom study can achieve. Students are unlikely to experience a radical shift in knowledge simply because they learn to identify language codes in First Nations texts. Moreover, we are always determined by our own cultural traditions and epistemological systems and we cannot simply set them aside through an act of will. Aboriginal intellectuals such as Ermine, Maracle, Blaeser and Armstrong are eloquent in their explanations of how they understand the relationship between language, knowledge and reality, but it is not reasonable to expect that non-aboriginal students will suddenly begin to think like aboriginal peoples. By studying First Nations writing students learn that different cultural groups have valid epistemological and aesthetic systems that are different from their own but not absolutely incommensurate with their own. Furthermore, they learn that their own knowledges are culturally produced and are neither natural nor superior to the knowledges of others. The aim of education is greater literacy, even if we have to acknowledge that students will achieve a limited form of literacy. In fact, demonstrating to students that they cannot readily apprehend and master the knowledge of cultural others is a significant pedagogical aim, for it prepares students to participate in the dialogue called for by "the politics of recognition."

Recently, literature professors have begun to narrate and analyze their classroom experiences when teaching books by First Nations authors. Diana Brydon and her students, for instance, found themselves grappling with the vexed issue of literary value and analyzed in print their collective struggle to decolonize both their assumptions about literature and their practices of literary criticism. In a number of published articles, Helen Hoy also explores the various challenges faced by professors and students as they negotiate their responses to First Nations literature. Detailed in one article but present in several of Hoy's essays, the related issues of "literary merit and literary elitism ... the politics of guilt and the status of truth claims ... visceral responses and intellectual ones ... literary author-ity and literary audience(s)" ("Discursive" 157) tend to recur in these self-conscious examinations. As Hoy examines them with respect to Lee Maracle's novel *Ravensong*, Native texts can have a profoundly unsettling effect on white readers who are explicitly positioned as cultural outsiders in relation to the story being narrated ("Because

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You Aren't Indian" 54). Some of these critics also develop innovative writing strategies – writing collaboratively and marking each voice separately in the text, asking questions to which answers are not supplied, adding autobiographical material as a way of positioning the authorial voice – in order to break down the protocol of individual expertise as it is currently valorized in academic institutions (Brydon et. al., Hoy "'When You Admit...'," Hodne and Hoy; see also Mathur and Srivastava and Hulan "Some Thoughts").

Students and professors of First Nations literature are working together to develop reading strategies and critical lexicons that are at least as subtle, sophisticated and discursively complex as the literary works they seek to interpret. This does not mean rejecting everything with the taint of the west, but it does mean putting western-based literary theories together with First Nations-based literary theories in order more fully to explore the literature. For some students, this will mean analyzing, evaluating and perhaps rejecting critical paradigms and methods that they have previously received institutional credit for performing. Non-aboriginal students, or aboriginal students with little knowledge of their cultural backgrounds, will also risk experiencing a feeling of unfamiliarity, even discomfort, as they read and encounter worlds they do not necessarily have ready access to.

V: The Work of the Literature Professor

Aboriginal and non-aboriginal academics bear collective responsibility for ensuring that the significant contribution First Nations literature makes to world literature is understood and respected, yet members of both constituencies face significant challenges. While First Nations academics feel pressure to be spokespeople for all aboriginal peoples and face the criticism that their academic work is too personal, non-aboriginal academics are caught in what Arnold Krupat calls "the double bind," damned if they do not work with Native materials and damned if they do (*Turn* 11-13). As Krupat rightly points out, "it is illogical and untenable ... for non-Native scholars to be excoriated when they fail to include Native American materials in their teaching and writing on American history, culture, and literature and also to be excoriated when they do include them, on the grounds of cultural appropriation, 'speaking for others,' experiential inadequacy, or inauthenticity" (*Turn* 11). If non-aboriginal academics do take on the task of researching and teaching First Nations subjects, ironically, the charges of cultural appropriation, rather than diminishing as their careers proceed and they acquire more knowledge, take on greater intensity, because they receive institutional credit for their work and sometimes financial reward, too. We are both implicated in this system of academic reward. We have both been granted post-doctoral fellowships from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for research projects involving First

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Nations literatures; one of us has edited a collection of essays written primarily by First Nations critics on First Nations literature (Hulan, *Native North America*); we are both publishing our research (including this paper) in academic journals; we have given conference papers on the subject; and we have taught courses on First Nations literature, at both undergraduate and graduate levels, in universities and in First Nations communities. The more public our work becomes, the more vulnerable we are to the challenge that we are somehow profiting, once again, from the appropriation of First Nations cultural materials.

Non-aboriginal academics necessarily approach this material as outsiders. Our work is what Celia Haig-Brown calls "border work." In such work, non-aboriginal researchers and educators are situated as "active agent[s] between nations" (229) who align ourselves with First Peoples (who also work on the borders) in order to invest ourselves in the social justice issues that concern the First Nations. The aim is to acculturate ourselves and others and to encourage a shift in the public mind.

To achieve this aim, non-aboriginal academics must assume an attitude of humility and patience. We have to ask questions; we have to be open to correction; and we have to commit ourselves to a long and difficult process of listening and learning. Many First Nations thinkers and cultural activists have devoted their energies to teaching outsiders about their cultures. The onus is on non-aboriginal scholars to heed these lessons and to acknowledge that they must be guided by aboriginal thinkers. In the editor's note to *Looking at the Words of Our People*, Jeannette Armstrong suggests that

> in reading First Nations Literature the questioning must first be an acknowledgment and recognition that the voices are culture-specific voices and that there are experts within those cultures who are essential to be drawn from and drawn out in order to incorporate into the reinterpretation through pedagogy, the context of English literature coming from Native Americans. (7)

Consulting First Nations experts is part of a collaborative learning process that has much wider implications. First Peoples rightly object when members of the mainstream make decisions about them without adequate consultation with them. One of the teacher's functions is to model responsible decision-making and accountability when it comes to studying First Nations subjects.

Learning about aboriginal pedagogical methods might be one way of coming to terms with the position of the cultural outsider in relation to First Nations materials. If educational practices constitute an episteme, as we have suggested, then one way to introduce alternative and possibly transformative epistemes is through exposing ourselves to alternative ways of conceiving how knowledge is acquired, maintained and disseminated.[17] From an aboriginal perspective, learning is an internal process where the aim is to transform the individual from within

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(Ermine 102). Becoming educated means taking instruction, often offered through stories, and exercising self-reflection. The aim of education is to realize one's own particular gift (Monture-Angus 78), but, unlike in the western education system where the emphasis is on individual achievement, in the aboriginal system, the emphasis is on preparing the individual to become a wise and productive member of the community who exercises his or her gift in ways that enhance collective life.

Aboriginal pedagogical methods can also be invaluable in illuminating aspects of literary texts that are specific to an aboriginal literary tradition. For example, First Nations literatures emerge from and continue – even though often in print form – an oral tradition of storytelling. Such a tradition requires the active involvement of a listening audience. Non-aboriginal students, however, are generally neither familiar with this tradition nor well-equipped to respond to it, for they are not trained to process and retain information that is received only aurally. One useful exercise might be to ask students to put their pens and papers away during readings, lectures and classroom discussions.[18] Attending only to the spoken word without later recourse to a written text requires students not only to listen but also to *hear* very carefully. They could also be required to speak (and not write) about what they have heard and what they have learned. Such an exercise would permit students to experience oral storytelling as a pedagogical method and as an immediate and embodied event.

Embodied experience of First Nations cultures can also be achieved by moving out of the classroom environment. Students can be encouraged to attend readings or theatrical performances of works by First Nations authors, to visit nearby First Nations communities and cultural centers or to participate in cultural events such as powwows. This seems like an obvious point, but since for most non-aboriginal students contact with First Peoples is mainly through symbolic signs, experience and knowledge gained from first-hand encounters is a lack that needs to be addressed.

Assignments and evaluation methods might also be rethought. One of the philosophies of aboriginal education is that students must be prepared to reflect on (and not just perform through imitation or by rote memory) what they have learned. Time for contemplation and reflection is a crucial aspect of the learning process, and non-interventionist aboriginal approaches to learning are better able to allow for that time than western approaches. One way to build in time for reflection in the learning experience would be to ask students to keep a record, perhaps on tape or in a journal, of their responses to literary and critical readings, as well as to classroom lectures and discussions. These more informal media often seem to invite personal, even private, revelations, yet teachers could emphasize that such personal information is not part of the course material. Asking students to analyze the *process of learning* they have undertaken, as well as the assigned material on the syllabus, would be a useful final assignment.

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Teaching First Nations literatures responsibly and well can only be accomplished when it is combined with research, as is true of all university teaching. The volume and diversity of literary works by First Nations authors in Canada, however, is still waiting not only for a wide readership but also for prolific academic attention. Teachers and students need resources to guide them in their studies, but so far the Canadian academy has provided them with very few. In Canada, only a handful of academics are researching First Nations literatures and publishing the results of their research for the benefit of others. The assumptions that govern the academic publishing industry also maintain the status quo. Too often academic scholarship conforms to Trinh T. Minh-ha's characterization of the discipline of anthropology – "a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them' [...] a conversation in which 'them' is silenced" (67) – whereas scholarship concerning First Nations subjects is better imagined as a dialogue between people of various cultural groups working on the borders between the Canadian state and the "nations within." Consider the issue of refereed academic journals. It makes good sense that First Nations experts be asked to referee manuscripts on First Nations literatures to ensure the accuracy of the information presented. It hardly needs saying, however, that this is not general practice. Furthermore, considering that there are proportionally few Canadians with access to (or interest in) academic journals, one has to wonder how such publications can possibly impact mainstream culture. For scholarship to reach a wide, public readership, academics might publish their research on First Nations literatures in newspapers or mainstream periodicals such as *Saturday Night* or *Canadian Forum*. Yet, given the current structure of tenure and promotion within universities, such publishing venues are undervalued. For the untenured professor, publishing in mainstream periodicals would be considered, at best, a waste of time and, at worst, evidence of poor judgement.

How academics receive credit for their work is also related to the issue of who benefits from it. If we believe that cross-cultural scholarship really is an exercise in reciprocity, then it is incumbent on us to determine ways of giving back to First Nations communities. Decisions such as that made by Julie Cruikshank and the co-authors of the ethnographic text *Life Lived Like a Story* provide one model. Although Cruikshank, a non-aboriginal scholar, is listed as an author of the book, the three elders who tell their life stories, Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned, are listed as collaborators, and, in the preface Cruikshank refers to "the four authors." Furthermore, Cruikshank earns no money from this work; rather, the authors made a collective decision that all royalties go towards a scholarship fund for "Yukon Native students who have an interest in oral history and want to undertake postsecondary education" (xii). Such endeavours have more than just symbolic value; the scholarship fund represents a concrete expression of the desire to return the gift of knowledge. Encouraging the training of young aboriginal

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ethnographers may not mean that in the future only aboriginal scholars will collect and transcribe life stories of First Peoples, but it does mean that both aboriginal and non-aboriginal academics will have the opportunity to work together within the same discipline as colleagues and as equals.

Conclusion

We have argued throughout this paper that there is a direct relationship between classroom study of First Nations literature and the transformation of mainstream culture. Through achieving greater literacy with respect to First Peoples in Canada, students and educators alike have the potential to become more informed and responsible citizens. Both aboriginal and non-aboriginal students benefit from reading First Nations literature: aboriginal students have the essential experience of self-recognition and self-validation; non-aboriginal students learn significant information about aboriginal cultures that will enhance their respect for First Peoples and increase their understanding of issues that concern them. Literary study has particular value, for reading First Nations literature requires an imaginative leap on the part of the reader. It asks that readers acknowledge and respect the world-view represented in the text even if they cannot readily identify with it. Such acknowledgement is a necessary precondition if privileged members of the dominant culture are to find the political will to invest themselves in issues that concern the collective good and do not simply guarantee their own well-being. Arguing from the perspective of Aboriginal Australians, Stephanie Gilbert makes the point that "[s]trength for Aboriginal people comes from the knowledge that we are not alone in our struggle. All Australians are in just as deep" (148). Similarly, all Canadians are "in just as deep," and it cannot be the exclusive burden of the colonized to end colonialism.

Notes

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1. This Ojibwe Medewewin Prayer was quoted by Annette Arkeketa in *Returning the Gift* (6).
2. See Lee Maracle's "Moving Over."
3. Louis Owens notes that "at the heart of America's history of Indian hating is an unmistakable yearning to *be* Indian – romantically and from a distance made hazy through fear and guilt"(3). In Canada, Margery Fee, Barbara Godard and Terry Goldie describe the ambivalence of the desire to go Native that Owens identifies.

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4. This is a reference to the Provincial Advisory Committee on Post-Secondary Education for Native Learners.
5. Hirsch's solutions are far too simplistic. Hirsch and other commentators on the right place too much emphasis on secondary school and fail to see that citizens learn about the society they live in as much from their cultural environment as from formal education, and they neglect important material inequalities that result in the disenfranchisement of students, issues of funding in particular.
6. The connection between literacy and ability to recognize key words on which his solution rests is unclear. Other cogent critiques of Hirsch's study include those by Barbara Hernnstein Smith, Michael Keefer and James C. Raymond. Hernnstein Smith criticizes the "illegitimate analogy between language and culture," arguing that "languages themselves are not the way [Hirsch] describes them" because there is no "national language" spoken "*over and above* various regional and other (ethnic, class, etc.) dialects" (71-72). Hirsch's study, she concludes, leads to "the continued deferral of responsible analysis of the nation's enormous – but quite complex and *various* – educational problems" (84). Gerald Graff takes a pragmatic approach in *Beyond the Culture Wars*, arguing that the culture wars are signs of intellectual engagement and that confronting difficult issues in the classroom is the responsibility of those in the university.
7. It is worth remembering that, in the context of the American debate about cultural literacy, Canadian literature became the property of the "multiculturalist" curriculum that Hirsch suggests threatens to fragment the national American culture. In Canadian universities, Canadian literature itself is the field on which multicultural identities are contested, as studies by Michael Keefer, for example, show.
8. This seems to be the consensus of contributors to Patricia Meyer Spack's *Advocacy in the Classroom*.
9. The dialectical relationship between Native and non-Native representation makes this possible, as Barbara Godard suggests when she describes Native writing as "a contestatory discourse that positions itself as a literature of resistance within the conventions, though marginally so, of the dominant discourse" ("Politics" 184).
10. The exception might be Canada's newest university, the University of Northern British Columbia, which services a large aboriginal student population and has made attempts to incorporate aboriginal educational theories and practices into its design.
11. In the modern world, the nation remains "the most prestigious form of cultural recognition" (Tully 8). Once Canada is understood as a state, rather than a nation, the recognition of "nations within" can take place without calling into question their status as nations. Recognition requires dialogue between informed citizens. The university can prepare citizens for that dialogue.
12. See Neuman. Of course, it is difficult to track when First Nations authors might be taught as part of other courses, such as Canadian literature, women's literature or post-colonial literature.
13. A list of Native Studies programmes at Canadian universities that offer at least one course in literature would include the following: University of Alberta, University of Lethbridge, University of Northern British Columbia, Brandon University, University of Manitoba, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, University of Toronto, Lakehead University, McMaster University and Trent University. This information was gained by searching university Web pages. The authors welcome information that would correct any errors or omissions.

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14. Studies such as Carole Gerson's analysis of Pauline Johnson's poetry and her status as a popular poet of the last century call attention to the fact that the historical construction of Canadian literature has been achieved through the exclusion of the contributions of First Nations writers.
15. Comprehensive and aboriginal-centred histories such as Olive Dickason's *Canada's First Nations* are invaluable resource texts.
16. Ideally, Native topics and materials would also be integrated in the curricula of other departments, such as history, political science, and philosophy; thus, literary study would be complemented by information gained in other courses.
17. For more information on aboriginal philosophies of education, see *First Nations in Canada*, edited by Marie Battiste and Jean Barman.
18. This suggestion was offered by a contributor to the electronic discussion group Nativelit-L. Unfortunately, the name of the contributor is now lost. Monture-Angus also comments on the difference between learning with and without pen and paper in hand (84).

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