ON THEORIZING NATIVE LITERATURES: SEARCHING FOR EFFECTIVE, CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE WAYS TO READ AND UNDERSTAND NATIVE LITERATURES

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ABSTRACT

My study of the Native analysis of Native literatures has developed out of my own dissatisfaction with the Eurocentric, non-culturally specific analysis that is commonly being applied to the study of these literatures under the broad rubric of studies of "The Other". As a Tsawataineuk woman, I find mainstream criticism and interpretation of Native literatures, such as Linda Hutcheon's "Circling the Downspout of Empire", Penny Petrone's ***Native Literature in Canada,*** and Helen Hoy's "'Nothing but the Truth': Discursive Transparency in Beatrice Culleton", to be simplistic, over-generalized, culturally ignorant attempts to force Native literature into the pre-existing framework of postcolonial studies.

This thesis covers three areas: identifying some of my problems with mainstream critical writings on Native literature, seeking out more culturally appropriate writings on Native literature as demonstrated in the first Canadian anthology of Native writings on Native literatures entitled ***Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature***, and finally, looking at some of the methods and techniques used in teaching Native literature and creative writing at The En'owkin School of Creative Writing in Penticton, based on my interviews and research there.

By focussing on the articles in the anthology ***Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature***, other critical writings on Native literature including works by Beth Brant, Janet Campell Hale and Lee Maracle, as well as my own research at The En'owkin School of Creative Writing, I have attempted to look for more culturally appropriate ways to read, understand and teach Native literatures in the university setting.

There are several culturally unique entry points to Native literatures that Native analysis illuminates. Confronting issues concerning identity is essential to the development and appreciation of the multidimensionality of Native literatures. Critical theories and analyses need to be drawn out of tribal cultures and histories in order to provide interpretations or to decode the numerous layers of meaning in tribal centered literatures. Experiential knowledge and issues of gender also require more rigorous and specific consideration.

What I hope this thesis establishes is that the field of Native literature needs to be reconsidered and re-evaluated in academia with significant input from Native authors, teachers and scholars. With this input, I believe that Native literature as an academic field of study can move beyond its colonized position of condescension to which it is currently relegated in the mainstream Canadian academic system.

I believe that my study provides some important insights regarding the need for changes in the way the English departments in mainstream universities teach Native literatures as well as the necessity of increased support for Native writers and academics through working together as Native communities within the academic environments, at the local, national and international levels.

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INTRODUCTION

In the process of considering a paper on the need for the evolution of Native literary criticism, many issues deserve serious consideration and/or explanation. When did Native literature originate? Is it a relatively new genre or did it develop thousands of years ago in the form of the Oral Tradition? Is it possible to consider literature written by Native people in English (a colonizing tongue) Native literature, or should it be categorized as English literature or Canadian literature? Is Native literature merely an imitation of the Eurocentric genre of writing, or does Native literature have its own unique themes, symbolisms, world views and narrative strategies? Is Native literature a singular category encompassing all Native nations, or is each nation's style of literature unique and distinct? Perhaps the most important question that needs to be addressed in this paper is who has a right to analyze and critique Native literature? It may appear from my categorization of chapters that I am attempting to prove that there is a rigid dichotomy between Native criticism and non-Native criticism. What I hope this paper establishes is that the field of Native literature needs to be reconsidered and re-evaluated in academia with significant input from Native authors, teachers and scholars. With this input, I believe that Native literature as an academic field of study can move beyond its colonized position of condescension where it is currently relegated in the mainstream Canadian academic system.

Native literature originated long before the arrival of the Europeans. Historically, artistic expression has played many important roles in Native communities. These functions include the passing down of information from generation to generation; the transmission itself served not only as an outlet for creativity and entertainment, but also provided a unique form of tribal identity. The legends, or forms of living literature, provided and continue to provide guidance, spiritual and healing teachings as well as a sense of the communities' history. Legends are a vital form of literature as they are inherently transformable through the techniques and skills of the storyteller. There is no assumption that the listener will automatically relate to the supposed "universal" story. The Storyteller crafts and molds each legend to meet the specific needs of the situation. This ensures not only the survival of the story and the historical information that is passed on through the legends, but also that they remain both relevant and accessible to all members of the community.

The place of legends in Native communities needs to be considered in order to gain a greater understanding of Contemporary Native literature. One of the many results of the mixing of Native and non-Native cultures, the result of the oppression and colonization of Native people, is the development of many different forms of Native literature. It is pointless to argue that non-Native culture has had no impact on the writings of First Nations people. Issues such as language, translation, education and the over-arching influence of Western culture have played a role in the transformations from oral to written literatures. Therefore, these literatures can be seen in varying degrees as being influenced by bicultural or multicultural experiences.

However, my interest in this project is in considering the potential knowledge that may arise out of perceiving Contemporary Native literature not in relation to European influence but rather as an attempt to bridge the distance between the living legends and the static written word. There are obvious reasons for making this connection, such as the potential that both the oral tradition and the written word have as mechanisms to promote and preserve meaningful and valuable histories, traditions and experiences of Native peoples.

In Native communities a keeper and orator of legends has traditionally been considered as an essential member of the community. This attitude differs from the status of the writer in mainstream society who is generally seen as a producer of a commodity, in contrast to the Native Storyteller who has a spiritual, prophetic role. While the Native storyteller was an important and honoured role in Native communities, the Native literature author is relegated to the field of the Arts often under the even more specialized field of Native studies.

The difference in the value of the storyteller in traditional Native communities as compared to mainstream Canadian society is immense and significant in understanding the differences in cultural values. It is difficult enough for nine out of ten mainstream writers to make a living at their profession. The Native writer has many additional obstacles that s/he has to face in getting his/her materials published and sold. One frequent obstacle is that the texts are often not understood by non-Native readers. Although the language used by Native writers - English - is basically understood by non-Native readers, the symbols, allegories, spiritual associations, general lifestyles and world view of the text are often beyond the grasp of the non-Native readers unless they are willing and able to familiarize themselves with the culture of the Native author. The results of non-Native society attempting to come to grips with Native texts are sadly amusing. The treatment of ***Honour the Sun*** by Ruby Slipperjack is a good example of this obstacle. Books such as ***Honour the Sun*** are often judged as too simplistic and are placed in the children's section in most libraries. For example, influential critics have made patronizing and ignorant comments regarding ***Honour the Sun***. The following comments of Penny Petrone are a good example of the prevailing attitude:

> The story rambles episodically, in the present tense ... The narrative voice of the child does not preach or make any sociological comment; there is no self-pity - *just the straightforward telling of the story*. (Petrone, 142, emphasis mine)

Petrone goes on to state that this novel is representative of "the way members of an isolated native community in the northern Ontario wilderness *think, talk, and act*" (Petrone, 142, my emphasis). This critique is disturbing for its self assured ethnocentrism. Petrone is assuming that she recognizes and understands "the way members of an isolated native community in the northern Ontario wilderness think, talk and act" without any effort to base her judgment on any form of experience outside of academia. Furthermore, I believe that Petrone's idea of what constitutes "preaching" or "sociological comment" is not relevant to a Native cultural tradition that may not secularize or compartmentalize stories in the same way as writers of her own culture might. Storytelling is a significant method in many Native traditions for teaching about lifestyles, beliefs, and social customs. These stories are far from being merely exercises in the art of imagination. The reference to the text containing "no self-pity" contains a strong Euro-Canadian racist assumption that all texts about Native lifestyles are either "poor us" or "wannabe" white stories and perhaps it illuminates the fact that if this were Petrone's story, she would naturally feel self pity. According to Petrone's description, the Natives of northern Ontario tell rambling episodic stories that do not contain any form of a political agenda or relate to morals and culture. Therefore, Petrone recommends this novel as a quaint, universal novel that can be appreciated by anyone who enjoys "the straightforward telling of the story". Essentially, Petrone makes no attempt to remove, or even recognize, the cultural barriers that exist between her own experiences and the experiences within the text.

The excerpt quoted above is representative of Petrone's limited analysis of Native literature. Her study is also the first book length study on Native Canadian literature. Therefore, in spite of the highly questionable quality of her analysis, Petrone's texts is awarded a certain canonical status in the absence of a body of criticism and analysis that would have a positive effect in the academic study of Native literature. It demonstrates that the mainstream academic culture has a long way to go before engagement with the Native text can be considered remotely culturally appropriate.

Although there are critics who write on Native literature without the patronizing condescension of Petrone, their work is marred by their inability to leave behind their Eurocentric assumptions. For example, Jeannette Armstrong states during an interview with Hartmut Lutz, published in ***Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors***, that many feminists have taken issue with her because she chose a male character as her protagonist in ***Slash*** (Lutz, 18). Such criticism implies that a woman can not write about a male and his experiences of internal growth in a way that could be meaningful for both men and women in a community. Armstrong strongly disagrees with this analysis of her text:

> ...[***Slash***] is a very feminist book, and it really works with, and talks about, female thinking and the empowerment of people through love and compassion, and spirituality. And whether you want to call it female power, that's beside the point, but that's currently what it's being called. I think it's *human at its best.* (Lutz, 18, emphasis mine)

Armstrong believes that in her own community men and women are not regarded as didactic polarities in terms of gender relations and interests. Rather, they are people within a community working towards developing a human potential that encompasses elements of both genders. Without respecting this difference in what it is to be a male or a female in the Okanagan culture, as compared to the mainstream Canadian culture, one cannot really understand or appreciate ***Slash***. The Eurocentric feminist critique of Armstrong's ***Slash***, which faults the author for not providing a female protagonist is not only misinformed but also basically irrelevant.

It is this culturally uninformed criticism that frames a Native text when it is taught to Canadian university students. The odd Native text does find its way on to university literature courses either in a Canadian literature course that seeks token representation or on postcolonial courses - courses dealing with literature of "the Other". On a personal level, as a participant in some of these postcolonial classes at the undergraduate level as a "Halfbreed" (Kwakiult/English), urban and university educated student, discovering Native literature was a very empowering experience for me. The struggles, fears and goals contained in the texts served to legitimate many of my own experiences. Not only did these texts have a profound impact on my sense of identity, but they also served to alter the course of my studies and career ambitions for the future.

However, I found that the reactions of the students to the texts were very often quite disturbing. Eurocentric comments such as "uncivilized", or "primitive" were often used by students in their attempt to describe Native culture. One student even went so far as to say that if Native people had a problem with colonization they should have done something about it hundreds of years ago. Another reaction was to state that it was "too bad" that Native people had suffered due to colonization in the past, but that modern day Canadians had no responsibility whatsoever for the actions of their ancestors. I am not certain as to whether or not these students were conscious of how offended, categorized and marginalized I felt as a result of their attitudes. Out of these experiences I learned that there are a number of basic issues that need to be addressed in the teaching of Native literature, such as respect, understanding, and learning to be conscious of one's own biases that may affect the reading of Native texts. It could be argued that these issues could be seen as Universal and therefore applicable to the reading of the literature of many different ethnic groups. However, what I am suggesting is that the issues of respect and understanding need to be presented in an approach that is culturally specific. Rather than merely teaching Native literature as a topic under the rubric of postcolonial studies, there needs to be a more specific focus such as Native literature, or, more specifically, Ojibway literature, with an emphasis on cultural and historical content.

In a recent third year postcolonial class that I attended, I found many of the same issues that I had problems with as an undergraduate were being raised in the classroom. For example, one student questioned the integrity of Maria Campbell as a writer for "allowing" her publishers to edit a significant portion of her writing out of the final version of ***Halfbreed***. This student's attitude demonstrates not only his lack of understanding of the marginality of Native writers, but also his comfort in judging Native authors and their work based solely on his own cultural standards.

However, in considering the extent to which students are conditioned to read literature in the dominant Eurocentric frameworks, the aforementioned comments become a bit more understandable. The English courses I took as an undergraduate were premised on the notion of the universality of literature. Not only does this approach ignore cultural differences as experienced in literature, it denies their very existence. Thus I was taught to read and analyze predominantly European texts according to Eurocentric criteria without ever comparing these texts and the accompanying critical theories with works and theories from other traditions. In fact, literary works from other parts of the world, taught under the rubric of postcolonial literature, were effectively decontextualized and taught under the aegis of Eurocentric theory. The study of these texts, as well as Native Canadian texts, I feel, became merely an exercise in expressing the instructor's and students' own cultural values as outsiders.

Although postcolonial theory situates itself as an oppositional discourse, in fact, it is as oblivious to cultural specificity as the Universalist theories. For example, Linda Hutcheon in her article "Circling the Downspout of Empire", appears to me to be more interested in positioning Native literature as a singular category within the existing dominant hierarchy of literature written in English than in developing an understanding or appreciation for the literature itself beyond this limiting positionality. Ironically, Hutcheon manages to label Native literature as Canada's authentic postcolonial literature without dealing with the contents of any of the texts. She justifies this exercise by referring to the political history of Native peoples. Although I agree that this history can be crucial to understanding many Native texts, I do not agree that it can be generalized as a reason for a singular classification of a "Native literature". A number of problems arise out of Hutcheon's argument, the most disturbing of which is its positioning of Native writing as writing against the colonizer's discourse:

> Native and Metis writers are today demanding a voice (Cuthand; Armstrong; Campbell) and perhaps, given their articulations of the damage to Indian culture and people done by the colonizers (French and British) and the process of colonization, *theirs* should be considered *the* resisting, post-colonial voice of Canada. (Hutcheon, 172, emphasis mine)

Although Hutcheon's appraisal of Native literature may be applicable in certain cases, her analysis leaves out a number of other considerations. Hutcheon's prioritization of the degrees of Postcoloniality not only serves to place Native literature in a permanent position of solely responding to the colonizer, but also serves to negate the validity of other ethnic groups' from claims to the position and the voice of the colonized in Canada. Hutcheon appears to be more concerned with using Native authenticity to validate the claim that Canada itself is a postcolonial space. Furthermore, her discussion of "the post-colonial voice" limits this literature to a position of resistance - a site for the study of the colonized response to the colonizer. Her analysis boils down to an essentialist and exclusionary judgment in regards to how Native literature "should be considered".

In his article "Godzilla Vs. the Post-Colonial", Thomas King discusses his own frustrations with the label of postcolonial literature being applied to Native literature. He views this categorization as an attempt of Eurocentric academics to see Native texts as merely a response to the process of colonization - something that the academics can relate to on a certain level. If Native literature is viewed as only a response to "The Other", the Parent, or the Colonizer, the literature is not appreciated for its numerous cultural functions, and, therefore, not completely understood. This limiting perspective blinds the reader to many aspects of the text, and also prevents the reader from recognizing the Native author's reasons for writing as well as his/her talents.

In an attempt to rectify the problems that I was faced with in the postcolonial classroom, I chose to explore areas that I felt needed to be examined and addressed in analyzing Native literature. Working independently, I sought to define a theoretical approach to the literature that honoured its purpose and meaning. The approach I developed was reading these texts as mechanisms promoting healing. My belief is that these texts have a similar effect as the traditional legends that have taught and provided the intellectual tools for growth to previous generations. I was not looking at texts that set out to be spiritual or healing as a stated agenda. Rather, I was interested in authors that used the form of story to inform and teach. Although my own goals in my reading may seem unacademic (I used no theorists, no critics, and included numerous comments on how the works affected me personally), this project is the most enjoyable and personally fulfilling academic work I have done to date. For me, this process of opening myself up to the story proved to be the most effective method of learning in literature. When I decided to study Native texts for their healing potential, I was following the lead of Native writers, such as Maria Campbell, who have articulated this aspect of literature very movingly. In her letter to Beatrice Culleton, Campbell wrote:

> Dear Beatrice,
>
> ...You have written an important story, one that should be read by all Canadians, Indians and White [sic].
> In the past few years there has been much controversy regarding Native children and the question of foster homes and adoption. Reems of papers and reports have been written. How many of those papers were written by people who have lived through such an experience?
> ...It is a powerful story because, with gentleness, it deals with the sickness in our society and our people. *It is the kind of writing that will begin the healing of our people and help a dominant society understand and feel the lives of a people it almost destroyed.*
> Thank you for sharing your story with me... (Culleton, viii)

The reason I had used no theorists for my projects is simple. Eurocentric theory, to my knowledge, is silent about literature's healing functions. It seems to focus mainly on things such as formal properties of the text, the relations between them, the problems of interpretation, and questions of authority. It seems to shy away from exploring what one might call emotional perspectives; i.e., perspectives such as healing, and empathy.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to study Native literature from this perspective since I entered Graduate school. Theory (e.g., Postcolonial, Post-structuralist, Post Modern, Feminist, French feminist, Womanist, etc.), as well as Eurocentric paradigms and assumptions are continually forced into my reading process. It became very clear to me as I began my graduate years that it would be a difficult and painful process to study Native literature at York University. In spite of the rather large English Department, only one half-course on Native literature was offered and it was being offered for the first time in 1994, the year that I started in the Master's program. This marginalization of Native literature, accomplished by reducing it to a postcolonial special interest course, ensures that the canonical focus of the Department remains unaffected and largely unchallenged. The token acceptance of Native literature into academia merely serves as another method of maintaining the status quo. Under the category of postcolonial literature, and, therefore, under the constant watch of postcolonial theory, the Native literature itself becomes a side issue, at best, in the academic classroom.

While the space allotted to Native texts in the Graduate Program is minimal, the utilization of postcolonial theory as the "proper" framework for studying them further reduces the time and effort spent on the texts themselves. One of the primary reasons for using theory in the study of "postcolonial" texts is to provide some sort of basis for the students to understand the texts that are from cultures other than their own. In the abstract arena of theory, this may appear to be a good approach.

However, in practice, the use of Western theory to understand (universalize?) the literatures from other cultures is based on Eurocentric assumptions. I became disappointed, and, to some extent angered, when I realized that this approach to studying literature could involve substituting the discussion of the theories in place of the texts themselves. One seminar that I attended, in my Graduate course on Native Canadian Literature Written in English, was supposed to be on ***Halfbreed***, but, instead, turned out to be about the application of the work of canonical Post Colonial theorists such as Foucault and Spivak to Native texts. Not once was a single issue from the text raised. Instead, the student struggled futilely to situate the text in Eurocentric theory. Although her presentation was not judged as entirely successful by the professor, the student was praised for attempting to bring theory into the discussion of a Native text.

Instead of these attempts to contain Native texts within the existing theoretical frameworks of academic discourse, a consideration of the separate Native Nations' cultures, values, history, world view etc., within which individual Native authors live and create, would be a far more valuable approach to understanding the Contemporary Native literature of today. One challenge for the system would be to accept other forms of learning as equally valuable in the process of teaching. Native Elders who have a lifetime of experience are considered unqualified if they do not also have a graduate degree. Yet, at the same time, professors who have no training in Native culture or literature are allowed to introduce these texts to students. There is an imbalance here that obviously needs to be addressed.

The need to find a different approach to teaching Native literature, one that is considerably more culturally sensitive, is critical not only regarding our understanding of Native literature, but also regarding our approach to other cultures in a wide variety of areas. The term "difference" has been coined as a popular postmodernist term that is used in theoretical discussions. However, although this recognition of "difference" - or respect - is often touted as significant in these academic discussions, in reality, these discussions rarely move beyond an exercise in rhetoric. Concrete changes are needed, such as an openness to other forms of cultural learning in the classrooms, and changes in the curriculum that reflect the cultural diversity of not only the university classrooms themselves, but the country in which these classrooms are situated.

The process of comparing and contrasting two distinctly different styles of learning and interpreting texts within the parameters of an academic paper is a daunting but challenging task. Speaking from my own experiences in the academic setting, as students, we are taught to question, criticize, theorize and universalize. To be a silent participant within the classroom setting is seen as non-participation. We learn to apply a certain style of language when discussing literature that effectively distances our studies from the majority of the non-academic community. Within this adversarial and competitive environment, we fight our way through the system for the privilege of passing on this style of learning to future generations.

However, there are other effective ways of learning. In ***The Native Creative Process***, Douglas Cardinal and Jeannette Armstrong discuss the values and beliefs behind one Native Nation's approach to traditional learning. Silence is valued over speaking without appropriate knowledge on any subject. Words are considered a great responsibility for the speaker, and, therefore, there is an injunction against using them carelessly. Inner strength, described as "Soft Power", which is "giving and flexible but strong", is said to be more resilient than adversarial or "Hard Power" (Cardinal et al.,96). In other words co-existence is valued as a goal over contention.

While the above discussion contains only brief generalizations concerning the Euro-Canadian University system's style of learning versus a traditional Native approach, interesting questions on how Native literature can, and should be taught and understood by the academic community can be posed from these differences. If accepting Native literature into the "Ivory Tower" means dissecting and interpreting the works based on academically acceptable Eurocentric theories and beliefs, it is inevitable that something will be lost in the process. This loss calls into question the whole validity and legitimacy of bringing Native literature into this institution in the first place. As previously mentioned, Traditional Elders who lack the minimum of a Master's Degree (i.e., the majority), are officially unqualified to teach the beliefs and values that are deeply encoded in the majority of Native literature. Even Maria Campbell, who has been cited as "the Mother of us all" by prominent Native authors such as Daniel David Moses, is not considered academically qualified to teach the history of her own people in her course on Native Literature at the University of Saskatchewan. Instead a non-Native person has been hired to teach Metis history while Campbell is limited to teaching the literature within the same course. However, the University of Saskatchewan is an exception to the rule in terms of having a Native person teach Native literature. In the majority of cases, the lack of interest and/or funding prohibits the majority of universities from even consulting Native people with crucial knowledge concerning the texts being studied. So instead, in the predominantly non-Native classrooms, professors and students struggle to identify with a text that is largely outside of their own experiences, with their own assumptions on Native life in one hand, and an Eurocentric theory book or two in the other. What is gained by this process, beyond selling Native texts, is highly questionable.

Is it possible to incorporate different styles and approaches to learning Native literature within the traditional, mainstream academic system? This paper will argue that it is both possible and necessary if Native literature is to emerge from the colonized position that it presently has in the university curriculum. The voices of Native authors and critics need to be heard to provide guidance and knowledge to students, along side of, if not in place of, the Eurocentric theories that are currently being used. Given the vast cultural differences and experiences of Native authors vis-a-vis the experiences of the majority of Canadian readers in the university system, it is not enough merely to place a few texts on the reading lists of a few postcolonial courses. While the texts do "speak for themselves", they do not interpret or explain for those who lack the relevant social and cultural knowledge. Neither is it enough to solely criticize the literary canon without addressing and working towards a feasible remodeling of the canon. Therefore, this thesis is an attempt to challenge the current system as well as to explore new possibilities.

In attempting to find a more culturally appropriate method of studying Native literature, this paper will explore three different approaches to transmitting knowledge. In Chapter One I will present a sample of non-Native criticism of Native literature. I have chosen certain representative articles and books of the biases embedded in mainstream academic approaches to Native texts. For comparative purposes, in Chapter Two I will examine the first Canadian Native anthology of critical writing on Native literature, entitled ***Looking at the Words of Our People.*** In this chapter I will be looking for differences between the approaches of Native and non-Native critics. In Chapter Three I will be discussing the experiences that I had in my visit during the summer of 1995 to En'owkin - a Native school for creative writing in Penticton. Here I had the opportunity to interview Native authors, teachers and students on a range of issues concerning the teaching process in regards to Native texts, the potential for the further development of Native critical literature on Native texts, and differences between mainstream academia and a Native approach to learning, to name but a few of the important issues discussed. In the conclusion, I hope to look towards changes and transformations that need to take place in our university English classrooms in order to engender a more fulfilling learning process, one that would be culturally relevant to the study of Native texts. It is my desire that this example should demonstrate to university administrators and professors that the traditional university setting needs to be decentered, and perhaps destabilized, if progressive methods of learning are going to be passed on to future generations of students.

CHAPTER ONE

The Current Status of Native Literature in Canadian Academia: Problems with dominant non-Native analyses of Native Texts

In this chapter, I will examine certain salient themes and attitudes evident in non-Native criticism of Native texts. In the following chapter, I will be focussing on Native approaches to studying the text as demonstrated in the anthology ***Looking at the Words of Our People***. The purpose of this analysis is not to find or create binary opposites in relation to race. There are a number of Native Nations in North America, and it would be false to claim that there is a singular Native perspective. This claim would be as inappropriate as speaking from the supposed point of view of a North American non-Native perspective, a claim that would seem to deny the fact that the settler populations on this continent are composed of a variety of ethnicities. In essence, my attempt in the following two chapters is to consider both Native and non-Native analyses of Native texts with the intention of contributing to the future development of Native theories, approaches and techniques that may enlighten and enliven our studies of Native literature in the university setting.

Before I go on to examine the attitudes embedded in critical writings on Native literature, I need to make visible an attitude that, although detrimental, remains invisible because its proponents deliberately eschew engaging with Native writing. Although these critics have acquired a considerable expertise in Native history, culture and literature, they restrict themselves to writing on representations of Native people. Terry Goldie, the author of ***Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures***, is an academic who falls into this category of critics. I interviewed Goldie in regards to this issue. His only condition, to which I agreed, was that he be able to read over and comment on the material from our discussion that I have incorporated into this paper before its final submission.

Goldie's book ***Fear and Temptation*** has become canonical on the subject of the representation of Native people. In his study, Goldie deconstructs and analyzes the non-Native images of the Native peoples in New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Having taken a course at the graduate level with Goldie entitled Native Writing in Canada Written in English, I was interested in exploring his perspective on writing about the representation of Native people as well as the teaching of Native literature in the academic environment. This interest was largely due to the fact that it was out of the experiences I had in his course that I felt the need to write this thesis. As Goldie's perspectives led me to question many of the assumptions and options that will be discussed in this study, I feel that his perspectives and views are an appropriate point at which to begin this discussion on critical and theoretical writings on Native literature.

As Goldie explains in his introduction to ***An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English***, (which he co-edited with Daniel David Moses), writing on Native literature is a politically loaded area for him:

> I guess my reason to do the project was that in my own book ***Fear and Temptation***, I looked at only representations of Native peoples in white literature. I had not in any sense responded to what Native people were saying. But I didn't want to write about Native writing because that would have been just one more white version of Native culture. I thought that to create an anthology would not give my comments about a Native voice but rather do a bit to get the Native voice heard. (Goldie, xii)

Goldie's firm belief in encouraging Native authors and critics to represent themselves has led to his own frequent refusals to publish on Native literature. Instead, he redirects offers to write or speak in areas of Contemporary Native literature to emerging Native critics/authors. This is not only because Goldie is cautious of the (perhaps inappropriate) influence that his comments may have on mainstream audiences due to his positioning in the academic community, but also because he is not convinced that his critiques would be useful or relevant to the Native writing community. Part of his reason for making this choice is simply based on his own perceived and/or imagined response of the theoretical "other" (i.e. if I was a Native author, how would I respond to these remarks about my work?). If he does not feel that his comments will be perceived as constructive, in his opinion, then Goldie chooses not to publish on the topic. In theory, his silence creates a space for a Native perspective. As well as having the potential to be more constructive to the Native writing community, a Native person then has the potential to participate in the development of specifically Native forms of critical literary theory.

In principle, I agree with many of Goldie's beliefs regarding this issue. However, I am left with a few outstanding problems that I am unable to reconcile in terms of thinking through his rationale, and the effect that his choices may have on the development of Native critical theories. I was disturbed when Goldie stated that, in retrospect, he thinks that he should not have written ***Fear and Temptation***. Rather he should have left that area open for a Native writer. As Goldie was writing about *white* representations of Indigenous people, I find it difficult to perceive his position as author as problematical. It seems strange to me that Native writers should be considered as essential to the task of dealing with the history of misrepresentations. The images created by the non-Native colonizers have participated in the oppression of Native people. In a sense, expecting Native writers to deal with their own misrepresentation can be seen as analogous to an individual asking some one else to go into psychotherapy for him/her. I believe there is a definite responsibility involved in evaluating and analyzing these historical representations and that this responsibility belongs to the non-Native community.

My problem with Goldie's political choice of academic silence on the issue of Contemporary Native writing is not that it leaves some space for Native authors and critics, but that it leaves a lot of space for non-Native critics who have not given their subject positioning an equal level of self scrutiny. It is these white academics who are published and received by the academic community. Goldie's "invisible hand" theory of (in)action (i.e., participation through consciously choosing non-participation) does little to change this reality.

What Goldie has achieved in this process is a personal level of freedom from politically and racially charged areas of discourse in the area of Native literary criticism. I definitely agree with and respect Goldie's beliefs that more Native voices should be heard on issues of Native literature. However, I do not agree that the only "Politically Correct" response from the non-Native academic community is silence. Furthermore, some Native artists openly state that they are writing not only for the sake of their Native readers but for all Canadians. Native Authors such as Maria Campbell have made it very clear in their writing that they are writing not only for people in their own communities but for non-Native Canadians as well. As Campbell states in the beginning of ***Halfbreed***:

> I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be
> a Halfbreed woman in our country. (Campbell, 8)

Campbell is actively engaging in the process of raising issues concerning race, class and gender and how they affect Metis people in Canadian society. Responding to Campbell's text with silence can be seen not only as disrespectful, but also as a form of silencing. What Flora Nwapa recalls from a paper presented by Ama Ata Aidoo in regards to African Women Writers is quite appropriate in this situation:

> She said that some male critics don't even acknowledge female writers. Every artist thrives on controversy, so *you are killing the writer if you don't even talk about her.* Being ignored is worse than when you are even writing trash about her. (Nwapa, 114, emphasis mine)

I hope that this issue of academic silence due to ideologies that claim that they are being respectful can be openly addressed in the future. Although there is a substantial amount of inappropriate non-Native criticism on Native works, I do not believe that the solution to the problem is to shield Native literature and criticism from the perspectives of academics altogether.

One suggested solution to the dilemma of writing about the Native other, if one is not Native, is suggested by Joy Asham Fedorick. In the process of sharing a personal anecdote, Fedorick gently encourages Native people to believe that it is possible to teach respect to non-Native people who want to engage in our culture. The moral of her story is "You can help teach an old sheep dog new tricks" and therefore she calls for all people to "help us train and sensitize others" (Fedorick, 39). She goes on to suggest a checklist that is an example of the level of self scrutiny necessary in order to justify one's own position in engaging in a culture that is outside of one's own. Her model is a "self-inventory check-list for the well intentioned non-Native artist contemplating the [Native] concepts and stories" (Fedorick, 39). While this check-list has been specifically designed to target creative artists, I am suggesting that a similar check-list would be useful for the non-Native literary critic and theorist. While this list of cultural courtesies may at first be judged obvious and unnecessary, after looking at a few criticisms of Native works I hope to show why this checklist is both relevant and essential.

SELF-CENSORSHIP CHECKLIST

The Ethical and Protocol Positives:

- Am I doing this with permission, both before undertaking and before releasing completed artwork or writing?
- Do I have consent of those affected?
- Have I attempted to use "as near as ... that man's words"?
- Am I being humble? honest? responsible? caring? open-minded and aware of my own filter screens?
- Am I doing this to support the emergence of Aboriginal artists?
- Am I art-driven?
- Am I courteous and fair?

The Disgruntling Negatives:

- Am I caricaturizing instead of characterizing and thus increasing negative stereotypes?
- Am I commercially-driven?
- Am I reading my own cultural interpretation into what I perceive?
- Am I failing to credit sources?
- Are my intentions destructive?
- Am I being arrogant? dishonest? untruthful? disrespectful?

(Fedorick, 40)

The first book length study of Native literature was published in 1990. Penny Petrone wrote ***Native Literature in Canada*** as "an attempt to correct the neglect that has plagued the literature of Canada's native people" (Petrone, 8). While Petrone is able to recognize a number of problems with previous critical attempts by non-Native people to analyze and appreciate Native literature (Petrone, 1), she fails to recognize and assumptions are not very subtly present in her writing. She warns her readers that "Western readers are prone to view non-Western literature in terms with which they are familiar" (Petrone, 5). She continues by stating that "...oral literatures must be approached from the religious, social and literary traditions that influence them" (Petrone, 5). However, by the end of her book Petrone makes paternalistic statements such as this final comment on Beatrice Culleton's ***In Search of April Raintree***: "It does justice to its dispossessed second class citizens and we are grateful for that" (Petrone, 140). In her conclusion, she goes on to generalize about the purpose of all Native literature:

> The literature of Canada's native peoples has always been quintessentially political, addressing their persecutions and betrayal and summoning their resources for resistance. The political dimension is an inherent part of their lives. Debasing experiences reflecting the new realities of political and social changes created by changing contact situations - suicide, alcoholism, self-destructive behaviour, poverty, family violence, disintegration of the extended family, and the breach between generations - *are real problems in the lives and tragedies of Indians today all across the country*. (Petrone, 182, emphasis mine)

This analysis somehow fails to take "religious, social and literary traditions" into any serious consideration. Petrone's analysis of these texts reads more like a pathology of social deviance that an engagement with the texts in a culturally relevant method. To add insult on top of injury, Petrone goes on to predict the future of Native literature in the following terms:

> Once the outrage has been exorcised, the self-pity and self-indulgence worked out, and the frictional heat of catharsis has subsided, new subjects and themes will take their place. In drawing upon traditional values to heal their scars, they will become liberated, and *the*

> *victim syndrome* will disappear. (Petrone, 183, emphasis mine)

Despite acknowledging that many Native communities are coping with extreme difficulties from within and without their boundaries, it is difficult for me to come up with a response to this statement that is not tainted with anger and sarcasm. Suffice it to say that, from her study of Native literature, Petrone has had no qualms in labelling me, an "Indian", as an inherently political person who is in turmoil. Therefore, she concludes, that I, along with all of my Native relatives, am going through a "poor me" phase. This analysis is overflowing with Eurocentric assumptions of what is good or true literature. Rather than exploring the cultural differences and originality of these works, Petrone categorizes and marginalizes them by examining them under the assumption that the colonial process and its aftermath are the only unique factors that differentiate Native work from non-Native Canadian literature. Furthermore, Petrone's statement implies that Native literature is at a primitive stage and that it will eventually mature and develop into something that is more comfortable for the non-Native reader to handle. I find this type of literary analysis problematical, offensive and completely inappropriate.

From what I have been able to tell, this text by Petrone isn't taken very seriously by the academic community. However, this in no way implies that Petrone's style of analysis is not widely used in both the academic and the journalistic literary community. All too often, mainstream book reviewers and critics base their reports on cultural assumptions and Eurocentric values that are not only inappropriate but irrelevant to the texts that they are analyzing. Although I find Petrone's work disagreeable, I do not find it the most threatening type of analysis. Analysis that gears away from sociological discourse and focuses on academic theories, criticisms, and

Eurocentric models of analysis are taken far more seriously by the majority of academics.

The work of Julia Emberley is a prime example of the discourse that is favored in the academic community. In contrast to Petrone's analysis, Emberley's ***Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory***, is a book that has a certain authority due to her inclusion of theorists such as Spivak, Derrida and Said into her analysis. This approach to Native literature opens up an entirely new set of problems.

My problems with Emberley's analysis began with her attempt at asserting her subject-positioning. I am always interested in the subject positioning of an author to determine how the author sees him/herself in relation to the subject matter of the study. I firmly believe that one must be able to acknowledge one's own positioning before one's views of others are legitimate. She started out by relating relevant history about herself and how she came to become interested in writing about Native women's writing. However, shortly after she began, Emberley apparently became tired of assessing her own subject position and, instead decided to borrow from Derridean deconstruction in order to obscure her own self-analysis:

> I/je am (be)coming (a)part from/of the history of an Anglo-American feminist tradition. (Emberley, xvii)

It took an incredible amount of self restraint for me not to close the book and return it directly to the library after reading Emberely's attempt at granting herself an academic license to act. However, keeping in mind that respected people in the Department of English at York were listed in the acknowledgments of the text, I continued reading.

What followed was not a big surprise. Her contribution is exactly the type of analysis that I have resisted to since I started the Graduate Program at York.

Emberley turns to Native literature only after a study of postcolonial theory and White Western Feminism. It is my premise that the irrelevance of this process surely should not escape the academic community. As a graduate student concerned with the whole topic of Native writing, it is not enlightening for me to be told by a non-Native academic that postcolonial theorists and Western Liberal Feminists are not relevant in a study of Native literature. This, I believe, ought to be obvious for anyone who has given at least some serious thought to a consideration of how Native literature can and should be evaluated from a specifically Native cultural perspective.

If the process of examining Western cultural perspectives could be demonstrated as relevant or beneficial to the analysis of Native literature, I might conclude that the effort was somewhat worthwhile. However, it is only the simplistic divisions of Native and non-Native culture that form the basis of Emberley's study. These Native and non-Native values, assumed from her reading of the text, are specifically outlined by Emberley in her analysis of Jeannette Armstrong's ***Slash*** (Emberley, 133). Emberley describes how differences that *she* has outlined play a role in the story:

> In the above table [constructed by Emberley] traditional conceptions of what foods to eat, what medicines to practise, what language to use, and so forth, are placed in opposition to "white" cultural values. In the drawing of an imaginary borderline between two cultures, an antagonistic conception of social relations between a subjugated minority and dominant majority comes into play. (Emberley, 134)

When I first read these words I seriously began wondering whether I was reading a critique on another book. From the perspective gained in my experience of interviewing Armstrong, and of being personally challenged by her on the issue of creating artificial binary concepts on what is "Native" and what is "non-Native", I knew that Emberley could be challenged in using Armstrong as a representative author generalizing on such an important issue. However, I read on, reasoning that this was only the beginning of Emberley's analysis of the text. But as I continued to read, I found it futile to make further comments since I could do no more than conclude that her other statements were also based on her own invalid assumptions about Native "difference".

I was likewise frustrated with Emberley's comparisons of Maria Campbell's ***Halfbreed*** and Daphne Marllat's ***Ana Historic: A Novel.*** Native texts have frequently been categorized under the rubric of Post-modernism, the tradition to which Marlet's text clearly belongs, because this tradition is seen as a description of:

> ...works characterized by fragmentation, discontinuity, indeterminacy, dislocation and self-consciousness. (Peck, 72)

I find the comparisons between Native literature and postmodern literature, articulated and explored by several critics, extremely problematic. The deconstruction of traditional literary patterns that takes place in postmodern literature may appear to have resemblances to Native literary styles that also do not necessarily follow traditional narrative patterns. However, this apparent similarity does not denote that the aims of Native writers are similar to those of the postmodernists. While postmodernist authors deconstruct the society in which they live in order to evaluate and criticize their own culture, Native authors are recreating their own societal realities in their work in order to preserve and celebrate their culture. Therefore, I believe that the prevalent comparison between Native texts and the postmodernist tradition that has come out of the academic community, as articulated in the works of Hutchinson and Brydon, and critiqued by King, demonstrates that cultural knowledge is seriously lacking in mainstream literary criticism on Native literature.

Emberley concludes her text with the same level of academic distance that she uses in her introduction. I suggest that this distancing may also be viewed as another way of showing some hesitancy or avoidance in dealing with the topic although in a manner different from Goldie's. Emberley's final words tell *us* what *we* can learn from looking at Native women's writing:

> An analysis of a strategically placed subject-position such as that of Native women allows us to rethink the wild zone as the limit of the Woman/Body metaphor and its work as a central and centralizing mode of social, political, and cultural critique. (Emberley, 170)

I find this statement by Emberely completely ridiculous. I was not aware that as a Native woman, I have a "strategically placed subject-position". My Native blood was in no way that I am aware a conscious choice, or as Emberely states "a strategically placed subject-position" but rather, it is a reality of my existence as a being. The ability to "strategically place" me is obviously in the hands of Emberely who is, self admittedly, an anglo white female. Colonization seems to be an appropriate term for this type of study.

Perhaps what Emberley should have stated is that she is strategically using the subject position of Native women as an arena to explore her own issues. I have a difficult time envisioning this conclusion as a worthwhile end result of an entire book length study. Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that I do not include myself in Emberley's generous use of the term "us", and therefore I feel distanced from the entire work. I find it just a little too convenient for a study that starts off with an obscured attempt at subject positioning fashioned after Derridean deconstruction to end with such an unexamined universalization of the positioning of both herself and her reading audience. It can be argued that this study is at least useful for academics who are unable to read Native women's texts outside and apart from their own theoretical and/or feminist beliefs. However, I am not convinced that this study does anything worthwhile for the study of Native literature itself.

Another approach that an academic can take in assessing Native literature is demonstrated in Helen Hoy's article ""Nothing but the Truth": Discursive Transparency in Beatrice Culleton". Hoy addresses critical responses to ***In Search of April Raintree*** that predominantly label the book as simplistic and unsophisticated by attempting to demonstrate that the text is extremely complex. Hoy's well intentioned defence of Culleton's novel is loaded with Eurocentric assumptions of what conditions make a text acceptable for study in University English classes. Hoy's primary motivation for writing this article was to prove to herself and to others that the text was not as simple as it appeared on the surface:

> Although I am committed to teaching it, I have, until now, found ***In Search of April Raintree*** embarrassing to teach. I have tended to place it on the syllabi of lower-division courses, and, in those instances, of Women's Studies courses where the focus is less on the literary/aesthetic dimension of the text and where the students' disciplinary diversity makes them less literary exigent. (Hoy, 173)

Hoy's discomfort with bringing this text into university classrooms forced her to reevaluate the text. Her new interpretations legitimized the text in her eyes as a book worthy of study in the academic setting. She has discovered numerous levels and hidden meanings in the text:

> Taken as a single, internally discrepant document, ***(In Search of) April Raintree*** conveys the simultaneity, the layered heterogeneity of the ways the fictions of experience, self, and truth can be composed. Its own boundaries become permeable, its identity elusive, multiple, palimpsestic. (Hoy, 171)

My problem with Hoy is not specifically in her reading itself, but in the approach that has led her to this reading. Hoy attempts to assimilate ***In Search of April Raintree*** into the curriculum rather than addressing the factors in the institutional setting that lead to the exclusion of texts deemed simple. The reception to Slipperjack's ***Honour the Sun*** and her later novel ***Silent Words***, are excellent examples of this harmful categorization of academics and critics. The simplicity of the language and the cultural differences can lead to interpretations by non-Natives that are amusing at best and offensive at worst. By specifically searching for complexity in Culleton's novel, Hoy is reinforcing the notion that the complexity of the text - not the content, theme, political and social beliefs and values etc. - should be the crucial factor in determining what texts should be read at the university level.

One positive thing that Hoy's article does is question its own validity. I found this aspect very refreshing. Hoy is open to reconsidering her own interpretations of ***In Search of April Raintree*** from a number of different perspectives:

> In reading Culleton as resisting naturalization of reality, experience, and self, am I co-opting ***In Search of April Raintree*** into the contemporary crisis of epistemological legitimation? Insisting on applying to the text the "linguistic turn" in critical theory? Imposing a postmodern/poststructuralist master narrative of polyvocality, instability, and indeterminacy on a (relatively) coherent, realist narrative? Am I simply substituting for authenticity a new value, the capacity for sophisticated discursive critique, to compensate ... for perceived inadequacies of craft? ... More importantly, am I in danger of depoliticizing the novel by reducing it to yet another self-reflective postmodern discourse about discourse. (Hoy 173-174)

I saw this line of questioning as the redeeming factor of Hoy's article. She is aware of many of the pitfalls of her own analysis. Through publishing this article she forces other potential teachers of Native literature to (re)consider the basis for and relevance of their own assumptions concerning what texts are appropriate to teach in the university setting. I would like to see more non-Native critics apply this level of self-doubt openly in their work. However, the fact remains that the main perspective of Hoy's article is to assimilate the study of ***April Raintree*** into the dominant ways of literary criticism. Appending a paragraph about her discomfort may be good for the soul, however, it does not crack the shell in which she has encased herself.

There are two anthologies concerning academic writings on Native literature: ***The Native in Literature*** and ***Native Writers and Canadian Writing***. Taken as a whole, the first criticism that I feel applies to both texts is that both anthologies include material on Native characters in the literature of white Canadian writing. ***The Native in Literature*** justifies this inclusion with its broad title. However, I am looking forward to the day when a non-Native book on Native writers will resemble something other than a traditional anthropological study. Taking the approach of a museum tour through the past in order to study the vital living and growing field of Native literatures is an extremely colonialist approach. One needs to examine Native histories and cultures in order to have a better understanding of Native literature, and *not* simply white perspectives on them.

Another problem that I have with these anthologies is that they do not include any biographical information about the authors of the articles. While some authors state their subject positioning in their articles, most do not. I find this editorial decision very frustrating as this exclusion seems to imply that an author's subject positioning is irrelevant to the material that he/she produces. Both anthologies specifically target Native literature but conveniently choose to exclude the critics' racial backgrounds.

Only a few articles at the end of ***The Native in Literature*** can be seen as pertaining to Native literature itself. Kate Vangen's article, entitled "Making Faces: Defiance and Humour in Campbell's ***Halfbreed*** and Welch's ***Winter in the Blood***" begins in a very naive and paternalistic fashion:

> Of course, humour among Natives is nothing new. North America's indigenous peoples have undoubtedly been using humour for centuries to "make faces" at their colonizers without the latter's being able to retaliate. (Vangen, 188)

Whether Vangen is aware of it or not, humour in Native culture actually predates the arrival of the colonizers and is quite frequently applied in situations that do not directly involve white people. Furthermore, I object to her use of the term "mak[ing] faces" as an analogy to Native peoples' use of humour. Native humour can actually be quite complex and quite frequently employs language.

Vangen bases her main arguments on Native humour on a passage from Rudy Wiebe's ***The Temptations of Big Bear***. The passage that she has selected is supposed to "illustrate the kind of defiant gesture "preliterate" Indian humour can provide" (Vangen, 188). So now, following her insulting description of Native humour, I am being told by Vangen that in order to study Native authors, it is useful to begin with the words of a non-Native author on Native people. If the situation was reversed, and, for example, Lee Maracle's experience with white men described in ***Sundogs*** was used as a framework to base the legitimacy of assumptions on inherently cultural traits of white men in Canada, this approach would inevitably be judged as a biased, inappropriate form of study. What I find even more frustrating is that Vangen does not even bother to address the issues that complicate her selection of Wiebe's text as the definitive example of Native humour.

The fact that an essay containing such a grim epistemological error was included in this important anthology speaks volumes about the deplorable state of (white) Native studies. It points out the double standards operating in the world of literary criticism where a highly sophisticated literary theory is applied to texts originating in the European traditions while Native writing draws responses based on critics' assumptions about Native "life". The conclusion of Vangen's article provides a good example of this attitude:

> Survival, *on Indian terms*, depends on knowing the right moment and proper gesture for humour but also the importance of keeping a safe distance. Humour mediates tragedy, both as part of the characters' world-view and as the respective authors' literary devices. Writing in English about the contemporary lives of North American indigenous peoples, Campbell and Welch are careful *not to imitate the white man.* (Vangen, 202, my emphasis)

I am stunned that anyone could make such generalizing statements about the numerous Native cultures on the basis of two literary texts. Why the issue of imitation arises at all is far from clear, yet it seems to be the Vangen's main point of reference. In fact, whiteness appears to be her only access point in regards to her own understanding and interpretation of the texts. It is obvious that Vangen has made virtually no effort to understand the texts from the cultural perspectives and beliefs from which they emerge. Vangen's absence of self analysis in this paper is incredible. As far as I'm concerned Vangen can make whatever ridiculous statements she wants about the texts, but I strongly feel that she should at least demonstrate some level of consciousness in regards to her problematic approaches and conclusions.

The other article in this anthology that I will use to illustrate the state of criticism on Native writing by non-Native critics is Jarold Ramsey's "Ti-Jean and the

Seven-Headed Dragon: Instances of Native American Assimilation of European Folklore". I primarily take issue with Ramsey's attitude toward the topic. My criticisms stem from the priorities he sets as to what is worth studying, on the one hand, and the language he uses on the other:

> [We] still know very little about an inter-cultural literary process which, if properly documented and understood, could tell us much about the imaginative circumstances of Indian acculturation and about internal rules and dynamics of traditional oral literatures. (Ramsey, 206)

This is a perfect example of academic distancing. His use of the term "acculturation" makes the colonizer's impact on Native people sound like an pleasant, painless experience. Although I don't deny that the study of European influence on Native myths and legends is an important area of study, I find his overall approach to the topic extremely frustrating and insulting. It is perhaps because of his use of terms such as "infect[ion]" to describe cultural confluence:.

> I am *not* trying to revive that old, many-headed monster of folklorists, the notion that Native literary traditions of North America are everywhere infected with hidden European borrowings and influences. That notion is an insult both to the astuteness of the transcribers of the Boas era - all of whom were professionally familiar with Continental folklore and were quick to point out what appeared to them to be foreign elements in the Native texts - and to the imaginative and cultural acumen working in the literature themselves, their ability to keep things straight between the authentic elements of their own repertories and what whites offered from their folklore. (Ramsey, 219)

Well I suppose that I should praise Ramsey for even acknowledging Native people at all after his exaltations of previous anthropologists. After all, he does recognize that Native people are able "to keep things straight". Unfortunately, I am far too insulted to say anything positive about Ramsey at all, particularly after his description of the process of colonization and Christianization as "what whites offered". Ramsey, once again, utilizes the notions of authenticity and foreigner, notions which I see embedded in the works of most white critics. He seems to be most interested in cataloging "authentic" Native elements rather than responding to artistry, and impact on the reader.

I recognize that my sense of outrage in reading Ramsey's article may not be understandable to many people. I feel that it is important that I try to articulate these feelings because issues that bring out these strong emotions in me are a regular aspect of my life as a Native university student. As an example, I would like to narrate an experience that recently occurred in a course I am taking with a professor that I respect. The classroom dynamics are quite open and comfortable in my opinion. However, in one particular class we were discussing the concept of "passing" - meaning trying to "pass" for white in order to live a certain lifestyle in mainstream society. As a Halfbreed, my own experiences with "passing" have been both personal and painful. So my anger and frustration grew as I sat there and listened to the class attempt to analyze and deconstruct the motives for, and value of, passing. I was further angered when the analysis turned to discussing the morality of the individual attempting to "pass". For me "Passing" is not a theoretical concept, but an actual experience that I spent many years sorting out. Although it was not my particular experience that was being discussed in this rather distanced and dry analytical fashion, I felt angered by the fact that it was being discussed in such a manner by a group of people who either could never "pass", or would never have to consider "passing". *My painful history and political and social reality are not for others to use as a sociological experiment!*

When I discussed this situation with others outside of the class, the reaction primarily consisted of questioning why I chose not to share any of my own experiences in this discussion. Primarily, it was simply because I was too angry to speak - or at least to speak coherently and not in tears. Also, I felt distanced from the entire discourse, and I didn't feel that it was my responsibility to ease the disruption that their discourse had created for me. Furthermore, I didn't want to validate their discussion by participating in it.

It is this kind of painful silencing that academic discourses, exemplified by Ramsey's article, cause for minority students in the university setting. Colonialism, assimilation, and Christianization are not merely historical facts for Native people. Likewise, the effects of these processes on Native culture as expressed through legends should not be conceived of as merely a site for study. It is blatantly disrespectful to disregard, or conveniently overlook, the oppression and devastation of Native people caused by colonization, in order to use their legends as laboratory rats for detached academic studies.

I suppose what I find disturbing in the Western academic style of knowledge production is its lack of emotion. Those discussing "passing" did not think about problematizing their own privilege or their own complicity in a social order that compels some humans to resort to passing. The same kind of distancing is evident in the examples of literary criticism I have discussed so far.

I turned to ***Native Writers and Canadian Writing*** with a great deal of expectation, given that it was a special issue of the prestigious journal *Canadian Literature* and included contributions from several well-known Native writers as well as some of the most recognized white critics and theorists. However, this well known anthology, as far as I am concerned, deploys the same old vocabularies I have documented thus far.

Native Writers and Canadian Writing has a larger number of articles that deal with an analysis of Native texts. However, here as well, there is very little offered in terms of non-Native analysis that is positive or enlightening. One author, Margery Fee is able to problematize the entire anthology in her paper entitled "Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette Armstrong's ***Slash*** and Beatrice Culleton's ***April Raintree***":

> [I]t is worth pondering the extent to which any account of these novels published in a journal called *Canadian Literature* is in itself an act of colonization. Obviously, the construction of a national literature serves the ideological interests of the state. (Fee, 177)

While I concur with her critique of the hegemonic category of "Canadian Literature", the manner in which she justifies her presence in the anthology suggests to me that she is not aware of the power dynamics of her own subject position:

> Given the depressing record of past writing about Native peoples and the power of the dominant discourse, this article is despite my best intentions at least as likely to oppress as to liberate. So why am I writing? Because like Armstrong and Culleton, I believe that writing can escape, if only transiently, the traps of ideology. (Fee, 178)

I have problems with her rationale for a couple of reasons. Although Fee has thought through her subject positioning and the potential effects of non-Native criticism, her actual analysis of the Native texts is very limited. Her description that both texts "expose the fake ideas and debunk the "choices" that white acculturation has forced on Native Peoples in Canada" (Fee, 168) is pointing out the obvious in the texts rather then contributing to the analysis of these works. I am disappointed that the one article in this anthology that shows a significant level of self analysis on the part of the author has very little to say beyond that.

Denis W. Johnson's article "Lines and Circles: The "Rez" Plays of Tomson Highway" demonstrates the reasons for my irreverence towards a specific branch of non-Native analysis. In his conclusion, after attempting to demonstrate an understanding of the plays, Johnson states:

> White society ought to watch carefully for this Native resurgence, because we need to learn from it. Our spiritual values have withered from neglect in our linear pursuit of progress. We are beginning to realize that we are poisoning ourselves physically as well, and we are not all that sure of our regenerative powers. We yearn for a society more in tune with Nanabush: more humorous, more visceral, less gender-bound. (Johnson, 263)

This white liberal approach to reading Native literature offers very little to the study of the literature itself. In many Native communities the name for a non-Native person with this type of outlook is a "wannabe". Johnson reminds me of a few people in my life who have asked me if they could go to my reserve with me with the goal of seeking advise and finding the answers that they have been looking for. Perhaps Johnson should rent Disney's *Pocahontas*, if he feels the need to search out such romanticized notions of Native spirituality.

My interest was piqued when I noticed that there was an article on the topic of education in this anthology. However, Celia Haig-Brown's "Border Work" merely proved to be a rather annoying article that described her self perceived role as an educator in Native communities. Someone definitely should have edited out the repetitive use of the word "border" - as by about half way through the article I was ready to give her a large push in either direction. But then her idealistic, liberal, and generalizing conclusion demonstrated to me that in spite of her perception of herself as being on the "border", in actuality she has both feet firmly rooted outside of Native communities:

> At any time, I can choose to leave the struggle for a more comfortable existence. I hope my work in conjunction with that of so many others will ultimately reduce the injustices immigrant people and their offspring have wrought against First Nations Peoples in the five centuries non-Natives have been in North America. I feel strongly that no matter where I choose to work in the future, all my work will acknowledge the ever-present struggle for control in which First Nations people continue to engage. (Haig-Brown, 240)

Admittedly, this material might convincingly be used as a speech at a beauty pageant. Perhaps if Haig-Brown spent half as much time helping Native people as she does on praising herself in this article, she might actually change the world.

One final article from another anthology, devoted mainly to postcolonial literature and theory needs to be analyzed before I conclude my look at non-Native analyses of Native texts. Diana Brydon's "The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy" proposes a new approach to studying the connections between Native literature (placed under the rubric of post-colonial literature) and postmodernism. As usual, when I face an article such as this one, I find myself somewhere in between anger and hysterical laughter, wondering why I should have to deal with such (contaminated) rubbish.

Brydon did not employ the term "contamination" in the manner that it is generally understood. It seems to me that she is using the term in the same way as "hybridity" and "metissage" have been used by post-colonial and postmodern critics:

> For post-colonial writers, the cross-cultural imagination that I am polemically calling "contamination" for the

> purposes of this article, is not just a literary device, but
> also a cultural and even political project. (Brydon, 191)

Brydon uses her own imagination to further this process of "contamination" by using the term "white Inuit" to refer to the messages that come out of two non-Native texts that largely deal with non-Native themes. She claims that the "Inuit" has come to symbolically represent a number of different post-colonial experiences in Canadian literature. Inuit then, has become synonymous in Brydon's vocabulary for a universal post-colonial oppression within Canada. I am really at a loss in trying to understand why someone would use this premise on which to base an article, other than the fact that the title is both eye-catching and offensive and therefore, naturally attracts more readers. Perhaps this is an example of what could be considered tabloid academia. Regardless of any possible justifications, the article is blatantly culturally insensitive. Brydon's attempt to universalize the position of the Inuit is merely another form of colonization where the colonized are used as a theoretical representation of a generalized state of oppression, that, ironically, is developed to include the colonizer.

I am aware that I have not discussed every academic article that may pertain to this study. To spend more time analyzing many of those articles excluded would merely create more repetition in this paper. For the time being, I am satisfied that I have demonstrated a number of aspects present in the works of non-Native critics on Native works that are problematic. This chapter has demonstrated troubling aspects that are present in non-Native analysis of Native work, such as the use of simplistic sociological commentary in place of literary analysis, attempts to situate the Native text within the frameworks of Eurocentric literary and theoretical categories, the need to locate complexities (by Eurocentric standards) in the story in order to prove the value of the text, non-Native perspectives passed off as Native theoretical models, the disregard for personal pain and anguish of Native people and their cultures under the guise of "objective study", the Orientalization of Native spirituality and culture, and the use of the subject-position of Native people by non-Native persons to accentuate their own feelings of marginality. In the following chapter, I hope to demonstrate that there are approaches offered by from Native communities that are more culturally appropriate when studying Native literature.

CHAPTER TWO

Searching for Alternatives: The growing emergence of Native criticism of Native literature in Canada

In the previous chapter, samples of non-Native criticism were provided in order to demonstrate problematic and/or inadequate approaches to analyzing the Native text. In this chapter, the first Native anthology of criticism and analysis on Native texts in Canada, ***Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature***, will be examined. My main intent in focussing on this anthology is to explore different approaches that can be used in examining Native literature that contain more culturally relevant and more respectful access to the texts. This anthology represents a significant stage in the burgeoning of Native analysis, criticism and commentary on Native texts. Through studying this text it is possible to speculate on the potential of developing bodies of Native critical theories and approaches to analysis that will enliven and expand the study of Native literatures.

What is perhaps the most exciting result of this kind of approach represented by this anthology is the possibility that Native critics may be able to analyze texts in ways that are more relevant to Native peoples themselves. Studies on the simple "straightforward telling of story" (Petrone) or "the layered heterogeneity of the ways the fiction of experience, self and truth can be composed" (Hoy) in ***In Search of April Raintree*** may not be as relevant to some Native peoples as studies regarding, for example, the kinds of spirituality that are in the text. (By spirituality, I am of course referring to Native spiritual practices as opposed to New Age interpretations such as Johnson's, discussed in Chapter One of this paper.) I firmly believe that Native criticism needs to be directed towards relating the literature back to the communities, families and experiences of the author rather than towards gaining acceptance and recognition in the academic community. Frankly, much of the Native criticism and analysis on literature that is available from the non-Native community is irrelevant to the needs and interests of the majority of Native people. Ironically, as Native critics we frequently mimic non-Native approaches in our studies, reinforcing our own colonized positions by writing to meet the goals, needs and requirements of mainstream academia. As I face this painful reality on a daily basis as a graduate student in a program that must perforce discourage alternative approaches to literary analysis, I must constantly remind myself that I am not writing for the sake of the non-Native academic community, and therefore, whether or not my work is accepted in this arena should not be my primary concern. In reality, if I am only producing material that will be exclusively discussed in the microcosm of the university setting, then this whole project can be legitimately deemed a failure and a complete waste of time.

Recognizing the cultural specificity in Native texts is something that Jeannette Armstrong was interested in promoting as the editor of ***Looking at the Words of Our People***. In the "Editor's Note" she states:

> I suggest that First Nations cultures, in their various contemporary forms, whether an urban-modern, pan-Indian experience or clearly a tribal specific (traditional or contemporary), whether it is Eastern, Arctic, Plains, Southwest or West Coastal in region, have *unique sensibilities which shape the voices coming forward into written English literature*. (Armstrong, 7, emphasis mine).

Through recognizing that Native authors are writing out of a culturally specific background, (dependant not only on tribal affiliations, but also on the extent of the impact of colonialism, including its assimilative effects), their works can be examined and understood on a number of levels that are not usually considered in typical mainstream analysis. It is important for non-Native readers to recognize that it is essential to learn to recognize and understand these specific cultural codes. By accepting that the author's Native culture has an impact on their writing style and substance that is significant to the reading experience, the non-Native reader then accords Native cultures the respect and recognition that they grant their own culture through the recognition of the importance of texts that define mainstream belief systems, for example, those such as Northrop Frye's ***The Great Code*** and E. D. Hirsch's ***Cultural Literacy***.

To date there are no adequate "encyclopedias" on the individual tribal belief systems, or on the effects that colonialism has had on Native peoples in the various regions throughout this continent. Therefore, Armstrong suggests that traditional sources be utilized to enable a greater understanding of Native texts. The recognition that there are cultural experts within Native societies who have relevant information regarding Native literature could provide a perspective that would have a major impact on the way that Native literature is understood and studied in mainstream academia. As Armstrong states:

> I suggest that First Nations literature, as a facet of cultural practise [sic], contains symbolic significance and relevance that is an integral part of the deconstruction-construction of colonialism and the reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practise. (Armstrong, 8)

It is from this ideological positioning that Armstrong has set out to create this anthology.

The articles in this anthology range from those dealing with thematic concerns within the study of Native literature to a study of specific authors and/or texts. Each article is prefaced by a brief biography of the author, including tribal affiliation, education, publications, and present employment. Including this information before each article demonstrates that the subject-positioning of the author is critical to the importance and relevance of the article. The words do not exist in solitude. Rather, they have come into existence from the experiences of the author, and therefore, it makes sense to consider the background of the author as an integral part of the process of reading their writing.

The first three articles in this anthology primarily deal with issues of identity associated with being Native in Contemporary society. It is important to note that the non-Native critics discussed in the preceding chapter did not associate their own subject position in a way that related to their experience as a critic of Native texts. In Native literary analysis it appears that identity is a fundamental issue. The current trend in mainstream academia appears to be to look at the work as an isolated piece, separate from the writer. This trend of thinking is generally referred to in the academic community as "The Death of the Author". However, Native critics challenge this notion in their analysis. Kateri Damm, in her article "Says Who: Colonialism, Identity and Defining Indigenous Literature", deals with issues surrounding the question of a Native identity. Damm asserts that the question surrounding Native identity arises as a result of the colonization process:

> Definitions of who we are not only affect First Nations people in North America but Indigenous peoples around the world who have been subjected to "the White Man's burden" of authority and control through the domination and assimilationist tactics of colonizing governments. "Who we are" has been constructed and defined by Others to the extent that at times we too no longer know who we are. The resulting confusion, uncertainty, low self-esteem and/or need to assert control over identity are just some of the damaging effects of colonization. (Damm, 11)

This is an important statement because for many Native people there is a certain amount of guilt that is associated with the question of the extent of our own "Nativeness". Recognizing that this internal questioning is another result of the process of colonization is important in the process of recognizing and affirming our present identities.

The non-Native assumptions about particular issues that Native people should be writing about affects how Native writers are received. As Damm States:

> In Canada, First Nations writers are often expected to write about certain issues, to share certain values, to use certain symbols and icons, to speak in certain ways. We are expected to know everything about our own cultures and histories from land claims to spiritual practices to traditional dress. More than that, we are expected to know this for all 52 First Nations in Canada and, where applicable, in the United States. And when we write, we are often expected to draw on this knowledge in poetic "tales" about shamans and tricksters and mighty chiefs. Perhaps this is why so many of the non-Native writers who write about us, write this way. Or perhaps it is because of them that these expectations have been placed on us. (Damm, 15)

It is inevitable that the majority of Native people will fail to live up to the expectations, or stereotypes, of Indianness according to images created by the colonizer's gaze.

Issues concerning contemporary non-Native influences, mixed cultural heritages, and the erosion, in some areas, of traditional cultural practices, add to the confusion around the question of identity. Damm points out that it is often the writings of "mixed bloods" that deal directly with the issues of the cultural differences between Native and non-Native society. She provides specific examples in authors, such as Beatrice Culleton and Leslie Marmon Silko, who deal with the experience of finding identity while being genetically and culturally a part of both worlds. Damm's analysis is particularly applicable to Emberley's study, discussed in the preceding chapter. Damm emphasizes that looking at Native people merely as binary polarities to mainstream culture is not only a false but a damaging approach. She suggests that the writings of Native authors need to be considered when dealing with contemporary issues concerning our identity as Native people:

> Perhaps the time has come when non-Natives will stop negating out identities and silencing our voices. Perhaps with the border crossings of mixed-bloods they will finally hear us. If not, the time has come for Indigenous peoples around the world to open our hearts and minds to each other. We can become the best audience for our arts and literature. ***We can write our own stories and determine for ourselves who and what we are.*** (Damm, 24-5, emphasis mine)

Damm's analysis takes the question of identity outside of the reach of the colonizers, emphasizing that as Native peoples we have control of our individual and collective identities. If non-Native society is unwilling to accept our identities expressed through art and literature, as Indigenous people of the world we are a large enough group to support and sustain each other. Therefore, Damm demonstrates how the process of taking control of our identity can lead to a sense of pride and autonomy.

Following this article there are a couple of articles that emphasize the diversity and multidimensionality of Native writing in North America and how these differences affect the issues of identity. Janice Acoose's article "Post Halfbreed: Indigenous Writers as Authors of Their Own Realities" describes how Maria Campbell's ***Halfbreed*** opened the door for other Native people to explore their own identities through their writing. This article is in part a survey of the different types of literatures that have been categorized under the rubric of Native writing in English. Acoose includes a valuable bibliography of works produced that she labels as belonging to the "Post-*Halfbreed* and *Halfbreed*" genres of Native writing. Her bibliography includes some non-Native writers, such as Fanon, who Acoose believes may be valuable to the study of Native literature.

Although I find this article can be used as a valuable reference for the study of Native literature, I do have some problems with this article. Acoose outlines what she believes to be some of the fundamental differences between Native literature and non-Native literature. Acoose states that:

> This very difference distinguishes Indigenous peoples' writing from non-Indigenous peoples' writing: Indigenous peoples' writing primarily grows out of a gynocratic-circular-harmonious way of life while non-Indigenous peoples' writing in Canada has primarily grown out of a Christian-patriarchal hierarchy. (Acoose, 38)

As a student of post-colonial literature in Canada, I find this statement inevitably problematic. It displays an apparent lack of recognition for a number of authors in Canada who do not come from a Christian and/or patriarchal background. Furthermore, Acoose falls into the trap of homogenizing Native peoples' experience when she says: "Indigenous peoples' writing primarily grows out of a gynocratic-circular-harmonious way of life" (Acoose, 38). Although Acoose's generalizing definition appears to suit an author such as Jeannette Armstrong, who was raised by a traditional Okanagan family, it does not necessarily define the experiences of all Native authors. I find these binary polarities a troubling position to begin the study of Native literature.

Perhaps Acoose's definitions are the result of what could be described as an impossible goal - attempting to differentiate Native literature without defining it in a way that further marginalizes Native authors who do not meet these definitions.

Through the use of English as the method of communication - a language that values binary polarities in the defining process - it is virtually unavoidable that the use of this language would lead to the creation of exclusive, rather than inclusive, definitions. However, regardless of the explanations, I believe that Native critics ought to be aware of the harm that they may cause in marginalizing Native authors who do not meet the criteria of their definitions of inclusivity. Furthermore, it is worth asking the question as to why we feel the need to search for these definitions in the first place.

The following article "Popular Images of Nativeness" by Marilyn Dumont deals directly with assumptions of what Native literature should be. Dumont's essay furthers the issue of diversity in Native writing by focussing on urban Natives. Dumont asks how urban Indians fit into the this hypothetical "image of Nativeness":

> But what if you are an urban Indian, have always been, or have now spent the greater part of your life living an urban lifestyle? Do you feign the significance of the circle, the number four, the trickster in your life? Or do you reconstruct these elements of culture in your life so you can write about them in "the authentic voice," so you can be identified (read 'marketed') as a native Artist? (Dumont, 47)

In what could be seen as a response, in part, to Acoose's descriptions of Native literature in comparison to non-Native literature, Dumont articulates the dilemmas that urban Indians face regarding identity. She describes how colonialist images of Nativeness have come to shape our own perceptions regarding identity:

> Th[e] prevalent 19th Century notion of culture as static which is founded on the belief that there exists in the evolution of cultures, a pristine culture which if it responds to change is no longer pure, and therefore, eroding and vanishing affects our collective 'self-images' as either: pure - *too Indian* or diluted - *not Indian enough*. (Dumont, 47-8, author's emphasis)

Through identifying the colonizer's image of culture as the basis for our tendency as Native people to doubt the legitimacy of our "Indianness", Dumont is able to move beyond questioning her own identity. Now she is able to assert herself and her identity as a Native person in her written work in an attempt to "counter these monolithic, singular images of "nativeness" that are popularly seductive but ultimately oppressive" (Dumont, 49).

These first three articles in the anthology focus on issues surrounding identity and how images of identity can affect definitions of Native literature. It is important to note that the authors are not necessarily singular in their approaches to and/or beliefs on these issues. The diversity of "Nativeness" also extends to the range of perspectives of Native literary analysts.

Kimberly M Blaeser's article entitled "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center", addresses many of the issues that are of particular interest to me in regards to my own studies. Blaeser questions the effect that non-Native analysis potentially has on Native literature:

> [W]e must always be aware of the way our own stories are being changed: "re-expressed" or "re-interpreted" to become a part of *their* story and *their* canon ... As I see it, the lesson for Indian intellectuals involves contemporary criticism and literary interpretation, because literary theory and analysis, even "canonization," can become a way of changing or remaking Native American stories. (Blaeser, 53, emphasis mine)

Blaeser's article, then, is a search for alternatives - "a search for a way to approach Native Literature from an indigenous cultural context, a way to frame and enact a tribal-centered criticism" (Blaeser, 53).

Blaeser discussed how she and other scholars of Native literature have, in the past, employed postmodern and post-colonial theories and other methods of established critical discourses to their analysis of Native texts. Although Blaeser does see some value in engaging in this process, she believes that:

> [T]he implied movement is still that of colonization: authority emanating from the mainstream critical center to the marginalized native texts. Issues of Orientalism and enforced literacy apply again when another language and culture, this time a critical language and the Euro-American literary tradition, take prominence and are used to explain, replace or block an indigenous critical language and literary tradition. (Blaeser, 56)

Blaeser attempts to rectify this situation by seeking out specific Native, or tribal-centered theories that provide cultural insight into Native texts. As examples of attempts to generate this type of analysis, Blaeser recognizes the achievements of writers such as Paula Gunn Allen and Gerald Vizenor. Allen, for example, "writes of the "sacred hoop" or "medicine wheel" as an informing figure behind much Native writing" in her book ***The Sacred Hoop: Rediscovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*** (Blaeser, 58). Traditions such as the medicine wheel have influenced authors such as Armstrong, who divided her novel into four parts consistent with traditional teachings. The medicine wheel represents a state of equilibrium. The wheel is divided into four equal quarters, and one explanation of this division is that each person needs a balance between the physical, the emotional, the spiritual and the intellectual. Therefore, the balance that is represented by the medicine wheel is certain to show up in the works of Native authors who are operating out of a traditional framework. This type of analysis can lead towards the creation of new frameworks for analyzing and understanding Native texts. In addition there is already a vast amount of critical material available that is contained within much of the Native literature itself.

Vizenor offers concepts such as "trickster discourse", "shadow writing" and "mythic metaphors" in his writing. By paying more attention to the voice of the tricksters in the narratives as well as placing more analytical emphasis on the mythic within many Native narratives, the reader may be able to comprehend more of the reality that constitutes the text. This is this type of exploration that Blaeser believes will preserve and protect the integrity of Native literature "by asserting a critical voice that comes from *within* the tribal story itself" (Blaeser, 61, emphasis mine).

Following these four articles that deal with the broader issues surrounding Native literature and the development of a specifically cultural discourse on Native texts, are seven articles that demonstrate how aspects of this type of analysis could be applied to specific Native works. The first two articles deal with interpretations and analysis of some Native poems. In "History, Family, Nature, Dream: The Musical Colors of Their Poems", Duane Niatum states that he is writing specifically for a Euro-American reader in order to encourage and promote a "challenge [to] cultural isolation and narcissism by a willingness to experience a culture in many ways different from his or her own" (Niatum, 65). Niatum describes a number of themes that are common in Native poetry such as the maintenance of an ancestral connection that is a strong facet of contemporary reality, a connection to the world that is based on unity and wholeness as opposed to conflict and fragmentation, and a sense of familial and tribal connection. Dreams are another important theme that are woven into Native poetry. As Niatum explains, dreams are an integral part of our experiences:

> [T]here is but one fluid circle of connections through which the several planes of being and doing, feeling and thinking, seeing and dreaming, living and dying, are interrelated spokes on the single wheel of experience. (Niatum, 79)

Through looking at Native poetry through these cultural lenses that Niatum provides, it is possible to read Native poetry against common Euro-American stereotypes of deterioration and dysfunction (Niatum, 80-1). Niatum's readings emphasize the survival of cultural values and beliefs demonstrated through the work of Contemporary Native poets.

A. A. Hedge Coke's article "Two Views of Contemporary Native Poetry", discusses the poems of two Native poets - Adrian Louis and Luci Tapahonso. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this article is that Coke emphasizes that Native poetry does not always "transcend gender" (Coke, 90) when being read by a Native person. Often in studies of ethnicity, gender is either overlooked or put on the back-burner. Frequently, women of colour have been forced by the binary dichotomies prominent in the discussion of issues as important as gender and race to choose one issue above and beyond the other issue. In reality, for a woman of colour, the issues of gender and race cannot be separated in such a simplistic manner. The consequence of living in a patriarchal, racist society frequently means for women of colour that they are ignored in both gender and racial analysis that has a direct impact on them.

Whether or not I agree with Coke's description of Tapahonso's "aesthetic female voice" or that "Louis is an accurate representation of many male voices" (Coke, 90), I do agree that it is important that gender issues be incorporated into the study of Native literatures. However, I want to assert that in using the term gender issues, I am employing this term in a culturally specific manner, not to be misinterpreted as falling under the rubric of Women Studies, or Feminist Studies within the mainstream academic system. As gender is a social and cultural construct, it follows to reason that there can be no universal feminism that addresses the needs of all women. Gender issues need to be analyzed from specifically cultural perspective in order to be relevant to the group being studied.

The following five articles deal with analysis of Native novels and/or autobiographies. In Damm's second article in this anthology, "Dispelling and Telling: Speaking Native Realities in Maria Campbell's ***Halfbreed*** and Beatrice Culleton's ***In Search of April Raintree***", she suggests approaches to reading these texts for both Native and non-Native readers. In her analysis, she shows why the narrative style of Culleton in ***In Search of April Raintree*** can be seen as simplistic due to the narrative of the story going back and forth between the memories of a child and the reconsidered memories of an adult:

> At times the point of view is clearly retrospective: from April's more mature 24 year old point of view. At other times there is a childlike naivete to the descriptions and observations which suggest that the scenes are retold from April's point of view as a five or six year old child. In both cases, the style is simple and direct and it is easy to believe that the memoirs are the work of the 24 year old Metis narrator characterized by Culleton. Perhaps, though the voice is too convincing: at times the straightforward narration seems simplistic rather than simple. So although Culleton manages to create an *appropriate voice* for April, *she does so at great risk.* The voice of April Raintree risks becoming monotonous and unimaginative, not in terms of what the story recounts, but in terms of how it is told. (Damm 2, 110, emphasis mine)

This analysis seems to be a convincing response to the comments made by some of the other critics outlined in the previous chapter of this paper. Damm accepts that Culleton's narrative style can be considered simplistic or simple, but moves beyond this point to explore the reasons why the narrative was constructed in this way and the effect that it has on the text. Damm does not use Culleton's "simple" narrative as an excuse to dismiss the validity of the book nor does she attempt to create a more complex reading of the narrative style. Rather, she explores its function in the text without condescending or attempting to valorize April's voice.

Damm emphasizes throughout her article that for many Native women writing is a form of empowerment. According Damm, the author's writing serves as:

> [A] means of recognizing and acknowledging the strength, the beauty, the value and the contributions of Native peoples. It is a means of affirming the cultures, of clarifying lies, of speaking truth, of resisting oppression, of asserting identity, of self-empowerment, of survival, of moving beyond survival. (Damm, 113)

Therefore the process of engaging in this discourse encourages a level of responsibility in the reader:

> As readers, it is our responsibility to join this 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 which still cling to the edges of our minds, and to create new opportunities for telling and dispelling through our audience. *In Words, the healing continues.* (Damm, 133, emphasis mine)

I firmly believe that this politically active and socially aware exercise of reading, that extends beyond the relationship with the text to one that includes and influences our daily lives, is both meaningful and necessary if the reader is to engage responsibly with Contemporary Native literature.

In Gerry Williams' article "Thomas King's ***Medicine River***: A Review", Williams points out some of the obvious points of entry or realities in the text for Native readers that may be inaccessible or unnoticed by the non-Native reader. An example of this is the unspoken division in the text between the Native and non-Native members of the community. Williams asserts that this textual reality mirrors patterns of association in many mixed communities:

> Native communities like the one in this novel exist parallel to the non-native community, with little social interaction between the two parts of the community. If this is coexistence, then it is a discrete coexistence, with a bare acknowledgment of one to the other. (Williams, 118)

Understanding this social reality deepens the reader's awareness of how important it is for the novel's protagonist, Will, to identify with his own Native community.

Williams also points out that although the narrative is from Will's perspective, the narrative is not of a personal nature. The reader does gain a perspective on Will and a mental picture of Will's character is gained through King's writing:

> ... through a method of indirect accumulation of impressions, inferring from what Will does because he rarely says what he feels about events and people. King uses this method because *Will is only one of many, one of a community* of people whom he watches, involved and uninvolved. (Williams, 127)

The narrative serves the function of emphasizing the community experience even though it is told through one main character.

After highlighting culturally resonant aspects of the text, Williams opens up the potential for other avenues of the text that could be explored:

> There is also a lot to be said for examining any story in terms of its psychological, spiritual, or mythical contents. Similarly, the reader, if he or she knew the writer, could examine the story in terms of how it was or was not an expression of the writer's own life and philosophy. Then there is the historical and cultural perspective that would ask the questions related to how the story fits into history of the area and how it was an expression of a particular culture ... (Williams, 135)

Williams marks out a number of approaches that would enhance the readers' understanding of the text. He demonstrates that there are a number of levels in this particular novel that are left untouched by an analysis which is ignorant of the spiritual, cultural, historical, environmental, psychological and mythical realities that are essential to the story.

The following two articles focus on what is coming to be known as Resistance or Liberation analysis. This type of study, in regards to Native literature, looks at texts as sites of the process of de-colonization and regaining a sense of both individual and cultural autonomy. Acoose's second article - "***Halfbreed*** - A Revisiting of Maria Campbell's Text from an Indigenous Perspective" - explores the sites of resistance in *Halfbreed*. Victoria Lena Manyarrows' article "Native Women/Native Survival: A Review of Janet Campbell Hale's ***The Jailing of Cecelia Capture***" analyzes the text in the light of her own experiences as a social worker and as a Native person. Through exploring her reading of the text, it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the effect that Campbell Hale's writing can have on Native people in terms of being "close to home". For example, Manyarrows' identifies with the sense of isolation suffered by the protagonist Cecelia; she explores that isolation as a problem experienced by many Native people:

> Psycho-social displacement and isolation are acute realities for most Native people living in this racist and a historical [sic] , which is generally ignorant and disrespectful of Native people and Native needs and wants. More than any other racial or ethnic group in U.S. history, Native people have been misunderstood and stereotyped into oblivion. The only way that we can be "understood" or perceived by the dominant white society and its believers is through stereotypical images and ideas, usually based on mythical images from the past and images of suffering past and present, which

> generally serve to not acknowledge our current and living existence, nor take us seriously as contemporary participants in society. (Manyarrows, 154)

Manyarrows' reading is largely based her own professional experiences as a social worker and her personal experiences as a Native person..

When I first encountered this article, I have to admit that I had a negative reaction to her style of analysis. My reaction contained both embarrassment and disappointment. I found that her process of reading the text directly and solely out of personal experiences was not helpful to me for a few reasons. The first and most obvious reason is that as a Native person, the feelings and perspectives expressed in the article were not new to me. The second reason that I found this article problematic is that it did not address any of the issues that I was dealing with as a student in a course on Native literature at the graduate level. The course that I was taking at the time emphasized the need for theory and questioned the validity of literature and analysis that was not dressed in academic style and language. Manyarrows' personal reflections did not fit into this academic framework. In retrospect, I am able to recognize that it was the parameters of the course, rather than a question of the relevance of Manyarrows' article, that needed to be addressed. I find my own initial reaction to this article a symbol of the extent to which I have been colonized in my own educational practices. While I am not advocating the creation of Native criticism solely based on a personal analysis, I now believe this analysis based on personal experience does, in fact, have a valuable role to play in Native theory and criticism.

In Armand Garnet Ruffo's article "Inside Looking Out: Reading ***Tracks*** from a Native Perspective" Ruffo attempts to decode the cultural knowledge that is valuable, but largely inaccessible, to non-Native readers, for an understanding of the novel. As Ruffo states:

> The point here is to proceed by examining specific aspects of the novel in light of Anishnawbe culture in order to attain some insight into these "perceptual-interpretative systems," and by doing so attain a better understanding of how the novel builds upon Native American culture. (Ruffo, 164)

Ruffo then continues by describing specific Anishnawbe social, spiritual, cultural, and mythological beliefs that pertain to ***Tracks*** and help to place the text in a more culturally specific context. For example, one of the primary characters in the text is named Nanapush. Those that are familiar with Anishnawbe culture, will recognize that this is an obvious play on the culturally historical character Nanabush. Therefore, understanding the historical and mythological significance of Nanabush is central to understanding the character of Nanapush (Ruffo, 166). He concludes with advice for non-Native readers who are interested in studying Native literature:

> For the outsider, then, attempting to come to terms with Native people and their literature, the problem is not one to be solved by merely attaining the necessary background, reading all the anthropological data that one can get one's hands on. Rather, for those who are serious, it is more *a question of cultural initiation, of involvement and commitment*, so that the culture and literature itself becomes more than a museum piece, dusty pages, something lifeless. (Ruffo, 174, emphasis mine)

This conclusion clearly articulates the aim and the importance not only of this article, but also of the anthology as a whole. What Ruffo demonstrates in this article is the value of cultural decoding from a specifically tribal perspective. Ruffo's cultural interpretation of significant aspects of ***Tracks*** should serve as an inspiration to other

Native critics of the potential value of providing tools to facilitate some level of cultural decoding and understanding.

The final two articles in the anthology deal with issues concerning the development of Native literature as a whole. Greg Young-Ing's article, entitled "Aboriginal Peoples' Estrangement: Marginalization in the Publishing Industry", emphasizes the need for Aboriginal Publishing houses that publish and market texts by Aboriginal authors. Young-Ing is the manager of Theytus Press, "the first publisher in Canada to be under First Nations ownership and control" (Young-Ing, 186). Young-Ing summarizes the history of Native publishing in this article:

> Aboriginal literature has had to struggle through a number of impeding factors including cultural and language barriers, residential schools, ethnocentricism in the academic establishment, competition from non-Aboriginal authors, estrangement in the publishing industry and a lack of Aboriginal controlled publishing. (Young-Ing, 182)

As these factors are still factors that many Native authors have to contend with in order to get their works published, Young-Ing advocates:

> Self-controlled publishing [a]s the best solution to all the problems which have held back and continue to hold back Aboriginal people in the publishing industry. (Young-Ing, 187)

In this way, Native authors can have their works published based on factors that are outside of the mainstream publishing industry's fixation with profit. Therefore self-controlled publishing promotes and encourages Native literature that is of "the highest possible level and most authentic expression of Aboriginal Voice" (Young-Ing, 187).

The final article, "In and Around the Forum" by D. L. Birchfield, recounts the activities that took place during a Native Poets' conference held at the University of

Oklahoma for Indigenous people of the Americas. Birchfield extensively names the participants as well as their work. I became overwhelmed reading these lists as there are so many Native poets that I have yet to discover. He recounts the importance of the positive effects that this conference had on the participants:

> Estranged from home folks by distance and by multiple layerings of education, estranged from their colleagues by their Nativeness, the second half of the 20th century has produced few crueler, more lonely paths to privileged agony. Their spirits were dying. Imagine their joy when they discovered they were not alone. As they began discovering one another, mostly by reading one another's poetry, the emotional explosion of affirmation and celebration created a new literature, now still in its infancy, as literature goes, now as old as the earth, as literature goes, changing, remaining constant, alive. (Birchfield, 204)

This is the exciting message that ***Looking at the Words of Our People*** sends to Native authors and students of literature - *there is a positive future for Native literature through the act of joining together as a community.* The next time I find myself questioning why I choose to continue the academic path that I am on, I will look back to Birchfield's article to remind myself of the incredible potential that exists in the possibility of developing an academic and literary community of Native people.

Through this brief study of ***Looking at the Words of Our People***, it is apparent to me that there are a number of culturally unique entry points in the Native texts that Native analysis of Native literature uses in order to illuminate vital aspects of this literature. Confronting issues concerning identity is essential to the development and appreciation of the multidimensionality of Native literature. Critical theories and analyses need to be drawn out of the tribal cultures and histories in order to provide interpretations or to decode the numerous layers of meaning in tribal centered literature. Experiential knowledge also needs to be explored. Issues of gender cannot be ignored, but also they must not be subsumed into the culturally dominant discourse (i.e., white-liberal-feminist) regarding gender issues. Furthermore, as we engage with our Nativeness in our literature and our critical theory, there is the potential for expressing and demonstrating cultural strength and promoting healing for our communities. In the following chapter, I will explore these issues further through listening to what Native teachers and authors have to say about the future of Native literature.

CHAPTER THREE

The En'owkin International School of Creative Writing: Examples of applying Native frameworks of education to the classroom

This chapter will focus on the ideas of some Native authors and educators about the use of Indigenous approaches for teaching both Native creative writing and Native literatures. The information in this section was obtained through interviews with teachers and students at the En'owkin International School of Writing in Penticton, British Columbia as well as from a number of essays and interviews in books by Native authors on issues pertaining to literature. En'owkin is affiliated with the University of Victoria and is officially recognized as a post secondary institution created by Native people specifically for the education of Native students in the creative arts. Through use of these materials I intend to demonstrate that there are culturally based approaches to the Native text that can provide agency for readers who have only minimal knowledge of the Native cultures of the authors and their texts that currently fall under the broad category of Contemporary Native Literature.

In the process of looking towards the development of an officially recognized separate Native educational system, it is important to understand some of the inadequacies in the processes of learning for Native students that are promoted in the mainstream academic system. One of the founders of En'owkin, Jeannette Armstrong, described in her interview with me some reasons why she was personally unsatisfied in the mainstream university system as a student. She stated that the education was one-sided, or Eurocentric in approach. The methodologies of teaching that Armstrong experienced were limiting because they gave minimal attention to the variety of perspectives available on any issue. She found that her own perception of the system was validated by taking a closer look at the word "university" - uni meaning one and verse meaning to be able to speak or dialogue. She suggested it could be argued that this deconstruction demonstrates that the university system was modelled on the principle of establishing one view as well as a discourse to communicate a singular and elitist perspective. If Armstrong is correct, an overhaul of the education system can be seen as important for all students. As Patricia Monture-Angus states in ***Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks:***

> My purpose in challenging the way that academics think and process is *not* a benevolent one for the benefit of some disadvantaged group. It is necessary for the benefit of all people. The goal is to develop legal and educational institutions which are inclusive as opposed to exclusive and hierarchical. (Monture-Angus, 27)

Inevitably, the current exclusionary practices within the educational system can be seen as preventing growth and impeding new approaches to learning. As Armstrong states:

> [The exclusionary practices embedded in the philosophy of the mainstream education system] creates the possibility that we may be moving backwards continuously as opposed to forwards when new things are being created everyday - but society doesn't move to incorporate these things in a healthy way. (JAI/95)

Aside from the obvious ironic twist on the stereotypical assumptions used by Western culture towards "backwards" or "primitive" Native cultures, Armstrong's comment demonstrates that concepts such as progress and development have different implications in the Okanagan culture than in mainstream Canadian culture. While Armstrong is not condemning intellectual and technological development, she is questioning their validity when our learning practices, as a society, prevent us from achieving a healthy development as people on a level that is in synch with intellectual and technological developments. This desire for a balance of both intellectual and personal development is central to how En'owkin ideally functions as an educational institution - developing as an institution through the ongoing process of meeting the needs of the students.

The balance that is sought after at En'owkin can be compared to the balance that is represented in the traditional teachings of the Medicine Wheel. The medicine wheel is basically a circle that is divided into four equal quarters. The four quarters represent the physical, the spiritual, the emotional and the intellectual. Like the balance of the Medicine Wheel, as individuals we are supposed to balance these four aspects of our being in our lives. In this way, En'owkin seeks to nurture the whole person, while Universities strongly focus on the intellectual.

There are many aspects of the mainstream academic system that prevent the development of a wholistic learning process. Frequently the bureaucratization of academia displaces teaching and learning as the primary agenda. Rather, there is a rigidity in ensuring that the maximum amount of material can be covered in the shortest period of time with the largest number of students enrolled in the course. The economic and bureaucratic realities that run the mainstream educational system are rarely in the best interest of the teaching and learning process. The system is openly antagonistic to the special needs of ethnic minorities such as Native people. Since there is a serious lack of programming that will attract Native students, it is not surprising that there is a disproportionately low percentage of Native students in Canadian Universities. According to Armstrong, one of the reasons for the low enrollment numbers of Native people in post-secondary institutions is that these systems do not prioritize students, and therefore fail to provide students with a challenging program in which they can engage.

As discussed in greater detail in the first chapter, there is a tremendous fascination these days with the new analytical approaches', broadly grouped under the category of theory, to studying literature. The use of theory is justified as supplying students with a model and agency as readers of the texts. However, rather than serving as an additional resource, theoretical models frequently dominate the discourse in classrooms. Theoretical discourses distance or even remove the literature itself from the arena of discussion and debate.

The fact that the vast majority of these theories are based on Western aesthetics and philosophical concepts makes them that much more problematic when applied to the study of Native literature. For example, in spite of its ahistorical, non-anthropological, and Eurocentric approach, postcolonial theory is frequently applied to the academic analysis of Native literature. This framework creates a barrier for Native students, such as myself, who desire to study Native literature from a more culturally appropriate perspective. Barbara Christian, an African American critic, speaks about a similar dissatisfaction among African American scholars:

> ...[U]nfortunately it is difficult to ignore this new takeover, since theory has become a commodity which helps determine whether we [as academics in the study of literature] are hired or promoted in academic institutions - worse, whether we are heard at all. Due to this new orientation, works (a word which evokes labor) have become texts. Critics are no longer concerned with literature, but with other critics' texts, for the critic yearning for attention has displaced the writer and conceived of himself as the center. (Christian, 37-38)

This new takeover has become the dominant force in literary criticism. Furthermore, it has led to an unequal relationship between scholars who choose to base their arguments on theory and those who use other approaches. While the latter group is forced to engage in the discourse of the former group, the reverse is virtually unheard of in academic debates or discussions. Since English Departments have become sites of the study of theoretical approaches to literature, literature itself has been downstaged by its own academics. In this environment, the process of introducing Native Literature into this arena could actually serve to promote the importance of the theories over the Native texts themselves, by transforming studies in Native literature into a test of the provenance of Eurocentric postcolonial theory. In this scenario, Native Nation's perspectives on Native literature has little opportunity for expression. postcolonial theory would be most likely to predominate in the discourse surrounding this literature, as it does in others.

When the use of contemporary theory is critically analyzed, it is evident that it is hardly a sound method of inquiry, particularly when applied to the literature of other cultures. In her analysis of theory, Lee Maracle, brings the issue into question:

> For Native people, the ridiculousness of European academic notions of theoretical presentation lies in the inherent hierarchy retained by academics, politicians, law makers and law keepers. *Power resides with the theorists so long as they use language no one understands.* In order to gain the right to theorize, one must attend their institutions for many years, learn this other language, and *unlearn our feeling for the human condition. Bizarre.* (Maracle, 3, my emphasis)

Lacking in tangible experience in regards to Native literature, the academic theorist deconstructs the literature using his or her academic tools. The language and theory employed demonstrate both physical and psychological distance from Native literature. Whether or not other cultures share the ideologies upon which the theories depend is apparently irrelevant. Like so many other forms of colonization, theory serves as a mechanism through which one can dominate (the texts) of other cultures, while ardently maintaining one's own world view. However, at least on a personal level, the theorists inevitably lose, as their reverence for their own ideologies prevents them from learning about the systems and beliefs of other cultures.

The process of deconstruction that takes place in the theoretical arena (read: the classroom) ensures that the story of a text is not an issue up for discussion. As Maracle describes:

> Academicians waste a great deal of effort deleting character, plot, and story from theoretical arguments. By referring to instances, and examples, previous human interactions, and social events, academics convince themselves of their own objectivity and persuade us that a story is no longer a story. (Maracle, 7)

Through negating the possibility of finding theory within the story itself, through deconstruction and attempting to fit the literature into preexisting theoretical frameworks, theorists either ignore or misread the story itself.

No discussion of theory would be complete without an analysis of the theorists' use of language. It is no secret that theorists have a reputation for writing in a style and with a vocabulary that makes their works difficult to understand for people who are not in that particular area of study. One reason is found in the ways in which words change their forms. Frequently, the theorist transforms nouns into verbs in order to create a language that is compatible with their processes of thought. This requirement to transform language emphasizes the theorists' need to express concepts through employing objects as descriptors (i.e. institutionalize, museumify etc.). Ironically, the reverse situation serves the same purpose. Verbs are transformed into nouns in an effort both to legitimize or validate the action, and transform the action into an act (i.e. deconstruction, defamiliarization, derealization etc.). Either way, experience is expressed through noun based words. Joy Asham Fedorick analyses:

> [U]nderstanding the structure of English and its noun-predominance freed me to understand the materialistic influence of the people surrounding me. When one is immersed in a language that primarily gears our

> thoughts to *things*, we become trapped in a value system of materialism...(Fedorick 2, 54)

Therefore, the language itself promotes materialistic readings. This is not the ideal type of reading for an analysis of Native literature. Many Native languages are very expressive in areas of nature, spirituality, and community relationship and de-emphasize individual ownership. The English language, created out of a materialistic culture, can not provide the adequate terms, expressions and images that are vital to the understanding of many Native cultures.

Another problem with this complicated use of academic language is that it is highly inaccessible to the majority of people. This criticism is particularly appropriate to literary theorists. While some use of terminologies and coinages can help the reader more clearly understand the author's point, more often than not the language employed by theorists is not only intimidating but serves as a source of confusion for the reader. There is frequent use of Latin, French and German words that are unfamiliar to the majority of people in society. Furthermore, the types of coinages employed by theorists do not provide the reader with easy access to the concept. There is a virtual littering of complicated theoretical vocabulary within the works of many theorists (e.g., Spivak's "subaltern", Bakhtin's "polyphonic", Showalter's "gynocriticism").

In the writings of Native people on the subject of writing, accessibility is often a primary goal. Coinages are generally kept simple and virtually self explanatory. To return to a previously used example, in describing the types of emotions and forces in human behaviour, Armstrong uses the terms Hard Power and Soft Power. While these powers could be described as male and female according to stereotypical gender characteristics, instead, Armstrong describes these forces in a way that could apply to either gender. Through her use of language, Armstrong is demonstrating how Okanagan beliefs on gender are not polarized and rigid in comparison to Western culture's traditional perceptions of gender identity. In using the terms Hard Power and Soft Power, Armstrong is referring to human conditions rather than separate male and female experiences. Armstrong manages to convey these concepts using simple terms rather than obscuring them in grandiose language. Another example of this type of coinage is Armstrong's use of the term spiral to describe:

> ...the open ended kind of societal structures which contain a cooperative symmetry concerned with continuance and yet facilitating the individuals capacity to continuously change and be enhanced in a balanced way. (Cardinal, 22)

The visual image created by the term spiral aids in the explanation and provides understanding of the significance of the term itself. This use of language is intentional on the part of many Native writers. In fact, the literary techniques of theorists are regarded as questionable and potentially dangerous by some Native authors:

> What is the point of presenting the human condition in a language separate from the human experience, passion, emotion and character?...By presenting theory in a language no one can grasp, the speaker (or writer) retains authority over thought. By demanding that all thoughts (theory) be presented in this manner in order to be considered theory (thoughts), the presenter retains the power to make decisions *on behalf of others.* (Maracle, 11, author's emphasis)

This perspective demonstrates how language can effectively serve as a tool of power.

If nothing else, English studies are consistent in privileging a particular group of people. Our notions of "Classical" literature, develop out of the reality that these texts were created by and for a privileged class of people (JAI/95). Current economic reform policies are further, albeit indirectly, reinforcing the canonical orientation of programming in English departments by cutting back funding that would enable new areas of studies to develop and flourish. Through this attempt at fiscal restraint, classes such as those concerning Native literatures are either cut out entirely or transformed into an impersonal lecture format in which there is a significantly higher student/teacher ratio. These factors severely limit the effective teaching of Native literatures, making the process of learning more impersonal and less relevant to the individual needs and concerns of the students. Consequently, it would be very difficult for a genre such as Native literature to flourish in what could be described as a hostile and generic environment. Therefore instead of working towards opening up a number of fields that have the potential to broaden and enliven literary studies, English departments are predominantly maintaining traditional curricula and styles of teaching. This privileging of "Classical" literature and the current economic reform policies affecting Universities are examples of how current processes affecting the study of literature widen the gap between the goals of university and the needs of students.

Armstrong firmly believes that there is not an adequate number of areas covered in mainstream academia in order to study literature effectively. From her own self-admitted limited (Okanagan) view, she feels that mainstream English studies lack a consideration of what might be referred to as background information of an author's culture, National, and individual experiences, including a consideration of rural and urban experiences, that she would naturally and essentially consider in reading the works of a Native writer. As demonstrated in Chapter One of this paper, there is a serious lack of understanding of Native pluralities in the analyses and criticism on Native literature by a number of non-Native academics. Ironically, non-Native critics are all too willing to acknowledge the cultural differences of white authors that write out of their communities in the Maritimes, the Prairies or on the West Coast. Native writers, however, are essentialized as "Native". This cultural blindness towards Native people has a significant effect on how their writing is received. The absence of differentiation among Native cultures is also felt in the teaching of Native literature in mainstream academic classrooms.. Armstrong's advice to non-Native audiences is to talk to as many Native authors and critics as possible and, most importantly, to open their minds rather than becoming preoccupied with defending European views.

There are a number of Native educators, however, who unlike Armstrong, do not have the advantage of effecting change within their own communities. A large number of Native people find themselves participating in the Eurocentric perspective from the extreme periphery, struggling to cope with the widely different dynamics of the University setting and their own personal beliefs and visions. In Beth Brant's ***Writer as Witness***, she relates an experience that a Native American writer Linda Hogan had in coming to terms with her position in the mainstream community:

> Linda Hogan once said that she used to think she was crazy, but then she realized that the craziness was due to being a half-breed in a white world. I believe that too. I also believe that being a Native writer induces its own madness. We are trying to make sense out of the senseless . We are trying to tell a truth in a culture that dishonours truth tellers and the story behind the telling. (Brant, 115)

Hogan's experience is not an exceptional one for Native people when dealing with a society that challenges and disrespects a number of principles critical to Native peoples' individual tribal beliefs. Brant's description reflects on the reality that is encountered on a daily basis by a large number of Native people.

Douglas Cardinal in his collaborative work with Armstrong, ***The Native Creative Process***, describes the type of healing that needs to take place for Native people who feel displaced from society in non-Native environments. In describing his own healing process, Cardinal relates the advice that was given to him by the Elders that helped him with his own healing:

> I was told that the world I had created in my mind was destroying me. I wasn't in harmony with who I was. In the ceremonies, to seek harmony within myself, I had to deal with the things inside that were destructive to me. (Cardinal, 37)

As Cardinal explains, this process involves a considerable amount of work :

> The difficulty is being able to follow the philosophy of total harmony in what we are doing at all times. I see it as culture shock. An attempt to move from one reality into another. It literally tore me up. I understand the whole thing now. The separate reality of what being a Native is. It is very difficult for any Native who wants to do anything in this [mainstream] society, because to do so separates us so much from who we are internally that they can't be a part of society. It destroys them and they get sick. (Cardinal, 44)

Ideally, according to Cardinal, the only way that a Native person can function effectively in society is by carrying their own Native reality around with them at all times. This provides the Native person with the ability to work harmoniously in a destructive and adversarial society.

En'owkin adapts these beliefs into their program. There are a number of different aspects included in the curriculum at En'owkin to foster the students' identity while coping with the effects of mainstream society. The creators of En'owkin have developed a program that reinforces the students' sense of self as well as a sense of their ancestral community. As part of this approach, the students are encouraged to develop their sense of connection with their own families and communities. This approach is radically different from the impersonality of mainstream academic institutions and their philosophies. The sense of connection is then translated into the students' writing. Also, the connection may, in itself, play an important role in preventing the students from feeling alienated and/or isolated in different settings.

While this element may not necessarily be the primary focus of the students' writing, it can be seen as an important factor in the writing, distinguishing it from other kinds of literature.

Beth Cuthand, a Native poet and teacher at En'owkin, feels that developing connection to community is one of the most important aspects of the curriculum. Statistically, only ten percent of the students in creative writing programs actually go on to write professionally. Cuthand believes that it is important to provide something of lasting value for all students in her program, including the majority that will not pursue writing as a career. She feels that if the students can gain a sense of their own unique history and community, it will remain an important part of their identity throughout their lives and be passed on to others whether or not they become professional writers.

The philosophies of teaching at En'owkin are quite different from the approaches used in the mainstream academic system. According to Gerry Williams, a Native writer and teacher at En'owkin, there are two general approaches used in teaching students in non-Native classes. The first approach Williams describes as a "Master/Student" approach whose agenda is to transform the students into clones of the professor, in terms of their writing styles and techniques. This method of teaching is what Williams has experienced in mainstream Creative Writing courses. The second approach, and the one that Williams hopes that his students would class as his approach, is a style that is more individualistic: it tries to develop and understand the needs of each student. This approach is consistent with the goals of the program that emphasize personal growth and the students' familial and communal ties. This style of teaching caters to the individual, but the focus on learning and growth arise out of the individuals' ties. Williams does not believe that it is valuable to place a strong emphasis on criticizing the students for their weaknesses in writing. Rather, he prefers develop the students' strengths. Williams believes that a consequence of this approach is that the improvements made by developing the students' strengths will effect the weaker areas of his/her writing. The students are evaluated, but in a positive fashion. Also, Williams feels that "the more you write the better you get" (GWI/95). Furthermore, he encourages the students to read more, works ranging from Native texts such as Lee Maracle's ***Ravensong*** and Thomas King's ***Medicine River***, to the works of non-Native writers such as Hugh McLennan and Henry James.

As I have never taken a Creative Writing course in the university setting, I am unable to relate any personal experiences as a student within a University Creative Writing classroom that would contrast with Williams' techniques on teaching. However, one of my students approached me this year with some difficulties he was having in a Creative Writing Class at York University. The student asked me to read over one of his Creative Writing assignments, an introduction to a novel. I read it over and told him that, although there were a few grammatical problems, I enjoyed his style and his creative method of introducing the text. He told me that the angry feedback he received was that his style was poor, as it did not resemble the style of any canonical English writers, and that he was advised to give up on Creative Writing altogether. This is an example of what kind of education a student in the mainstream "Master/Student" classroom may be provided with when he or she refuses to be cloned.

It's true that a lot if Creative Writing classes produce certain kinds of writing. But the philosophy at En'owkin is not validated by being opposite from what is provided in a University classroom. En'owkin's Creative Writing program is unique and has its own integrity. Armstrong emphasizes that flexibility in the approach to teaching is crucial to the Creative Writing program at En'owkin in order to avoid the pitfalls of prescribing writing techniques to students. In the classroom, a teacher may have students who want to write about social change. Obviously their needs will be different from those of other students, from a different nation, who wants to deal with historical issues. Yet in spite of the spectrum of different needs of the students in the classroom, the teacher must aim not only to meet such individual needs, but also ensure that all students are provided with the same fundamentals (i.e., grammatical and structural essentials for authors writing in English).

In terms of delivering the program, the En'owkin Centre must find a balance between their own teaching philosophies and requirements enforced on them by other institutions. As En'owkin is affiliated with the University of Victoria, there must be to some extent a correspondence in curriculum. This is particularly important in providing students with the criteria that will enable them to transfer into mainstream institutions upon completion of the two year program. Furthermore, the Department of Indian Affairs, as well as band program financiers, also place requirements on the school. Maintaining a balance between the open and liberal ideologies of the school and complying with the outside demands is not a simple task. During my brief five week visit to En'owkin, I witnessed the frustration - sometimes resulting in chaos - that taxed the school's administrators as they attempted to deal with these separate, and often conflicting needs.

The En'owkin Centre intends to do more than provide an education to their students for the two years of the program. Armstrong states that one of the goals of the school is to engender a type of thinking that she terms as wholistic. In this mode of thought, students learn to relate issues - such as colonization and the breakdown of the Native family - to their own communities. Armstrong says that the students learn to "Look through the lens that looks back to the land and to the people" (JAI/95). In essence they learn to identify themselves in relation to how these issues have affected their communities. One of the eventual goals is for the students to learn that isolation is not related to proximity or place. In reality, explains Armstrong, one is never alone if a strong sense of relationship to family, land and Nation is developed.

Resembling a model of a continuous spiral, this process has the potential to initiate and shape a student's learning experiences throughout his/her life (Cardinal, 22). This experience may also have an impact in affecting that student's contribution in his/her own community. Subsequently, the community may in turn have an effect beyond its boundaries. This belief in the potential impact of education is central to the conceptions of how En'owkin can function as a dynamic and invigorating force for Native communities.

Since En'owkin has such a strong sense of responsibility about providing courses that meet with the philosophies and the principles of the school, the careful selection of the teaching staff is vital. According to Armstrong, the school seeks out Native instructors who "have the approach to inquiry that we require and do not have a rigid view of what Creative Writing might be, but have some skills in terms of assisting the students' creativity and yet have some idea of the basic fundamentals" (JAI/95). Therefore, En'owkin requires more in terms of its instructors than a university degree.

It is important to recognize that this approach to learning is largely developed out of the beliefs of the Okanagan Nation. There are different approaches and philosophies of learning in other Native Nations. Therefore, En'owkin should not be considered as a blueprint for other Native Nations to imitate. Rather, En'owkin is one example of how traditional beliefs can be maintained and promoted in a Native run post secondary institution.

In the first year of study, students are presented with a broad range of issues concerning writing. Classes investigate topics such as the comparison of the European genre of fiction and Native fiction, the comparison of traditional and contemporary tribal literatures, and the problems of maintaining individual integrity while writing in a tribal tradition. Armstrong helped me to understand the last topic by pointing out that my status as a Kwakiult woman does not necessarily imply that I agree with the entire philosophy of the Kwakiult Nation. As a female writer, I would have to come to terms with the hierarchical and patriarchal systems of privilege and power that exist within the Kwakiult Nation. Through specific examinations such as these, Armstrong believes that the students have the opportunity to gain a more clearly defined perspective on the possibilities for Native fiction.

Armstrong spoke to me about how the traditional structures of legends can be revealed and then incorporated into the student's own Creative Writing. First, the traditional legends and performances of a particular tribe are analyzed and their mechanics laid bare. Once the structure is understood, the student can recreate and use it as a literary framework. These traditional frameworks can then become the basic structure for the student's own Creative Writing.

As well as studying European poetry, the students in the Poetry classes study past and present Indigenous poets. They analyze various approaches to rhythm, the use of words, the sounds of words as well as the structural formats of the poetry of different Native Nations. General themes concerning Native people are explored as are the more specific themes that arise in the poetry of individual Native Nations. There is also an emphasis on looking at the relationship between poetry and music.

According to William George, a former student at En'owkin who is now actively pursuing a career in writing, one of the most important issues that was discussed during his studies was the importance of understanding the difference in the use of symbols, metaphors and themes in Native writing as compared to those used in European writing. Also, the Native world views are compared with the European ones. These differences in world views and the understanding of symbols are important for the students to be aware of when they consider the comprehension ability of potential audience(s) that they are addressing. There is no assumption at En'owkin that any writer's story should be naturally accepted as having a universal significance. Rather, cultural differences in literature are investigated in order to understand how devices of literature function differently in various cultures. These studies provided George with the ability to position himself in this spectrum of ideas and beliefs not only as a writer, but also as a Native person (WGI/95).

Mainstream critical theory is also included in the curriculum for all students. Williams feels that the students will gain a stronger sense of identity by recognizing differences between cultures (GWI/95). Armstrong believes that making Eurocentric critical materials available to the students will provide them with the opportunity to confront the theoretical assumptions that will be applied to their work in the future. Therefore, the students will have a greater base of knowledge from which they can defend these positions.

Throughout the program, as in other creative writing programs, there is a strong emphasis on requiring the students to complete assignments to strengthen their basic writing skills. In the first year there is an emphasis on the development of skills in cooperative learning while students focus on individual interests (tribal, gender, sexuality, etc.). In the second year the students utilize their cooperative skills by working together in the classroom, providing comments and critiques on each other's writing. The intent of this activity is to encourage each student to accept criticism and incorporate it into their work.

An important course in the curriculum at En'owkin is one that teaches students how to deal with the publishing industry. The course is taught by Greg Young-Ing, the manager of Theytus Press, a publishing company directly affiliated with En'owkin. Drawing on his own experiences, Young-Ing advises the students of what they can expect in dealing with publishers, and he provides strategies and approaches that may be effective in getting their works published.

According to Barbara Helen Hill, a student at En'owkin and author of a soon to be published book on healing and recovery, the school provided her with the opportunity to write in a way that is comfortable for her and has inspired her to continue writing. Hill feels that she does not want to stifle the creativity that she has developed by returning to the mainstream academic setting. After completing her second year at En'owkin she intends to find another Native Creative Writing program somewhere in North America or to find a Native mentor who can help her continue the process of developing her skills (BHHI/95).

George stated that his experiences as a student at En'owkin provided him with the opportunity to develop skills in presenting his writing to others. Through extra curricular activities, such as presentations to the general public at En'owkin as well as in other communities, George developed confidence in his public speaking abilities and a recognition of his talents as both an orator and a writer (WGI/95). These presentations involving community involvement encourage the students to be responsible both in their writing and in sharing their writing with others. The lay community provides an opportunity for the writers to be in touch with an audience.

Furthermore, the relationship between written work and the performance and orality of the literature is emphasized and enhanced in this forum. This regular feature of En'owkin's program is used to encourage students to explore their oratorical talents and provide them with the opportunity to share their writing with a broader group of people.

Cuthand believes that the relationship between performance and literature is particularly strong for Native Creative Writers. She believes this to be the case even when the students are raised in an urban environment, separated from their Native communities. She describes that in oral presentation the students come to "feel a high" when successfully telling a story. She continues by saying that part of the reason for this emotion is that the students have learned to use their "voice as an instrument to continue the song of their ancestors" (BCI/95). Cuthand emphasizes that, in this way, words are not used as "weapons of power" but rather as "tools of medicine". Maracle describes this function of oratory in greater detail:

> We regard words as coming from original being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive. Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. (Maracle, 3)

It is through orality that the story is transformed into an active state. Therefore, orality and social interaction have a direct connection to literature for many Native writers.

Armstrong emphasizes the connectedness between the oral tradition and contemporary Native literature and its importance in her interview with Hartmut Lutz. She claims that in writing ***Slash*** she has not replaced the oral tradition. Rather she is complementing and expanding on this tradition through her writing:

> [A]n oral tradition *will* be there. It is remaining and it is intact. But those oral traditions teach a certain number of people in our community, whereas a written piece like a novel can reach further than that. (Armstrong in Lutz, 15)

Therefore, the orality remains a critical element of the text, and the text serves as a vehicle for the orality and the story.

Brant emphasizes that although the story has been adapted into the written form in Contemporary Native Literature, the orality of the story is still a central element:

> The written becomes the spoken, whether by hands or mouth, the spoken enters the heart, the heart turns over, Earth is renewed. (Brant, 82)

Brant claims that she "can't think of any Native writer who does not like to read his or her work aloud" (Brant, 40). This cyclical nature of communicating the story in written form and in oral expression maintains the connection to the traditional oral ways of Native societies. As Brant describes in discussing Native women's writing:

> We do not write as individuals communing with a muse. We write as members of an ancient cultural consciousness. Our "muse" is us. Our "muse" is our ancestors. Our "muse" is our children, our grandchildren, our parents, our lovers. Our "muse" is Earth and the stories she holds in the rocks, the trees the birds , the fish, the animals, the waters. Our words come from the very place of all life, the spirits who swirl around us, cajoling us, chastising us, loving us. (Brant, 10)

This process of creating a story may sound mystical or even appear as fantasy. However, traditionally in many Native communities this spiritual connection to all things is a crucial part of their belief systems. The fact that Brant describes this sense of spirituality as fundamental demonstrates by example that this belief system has not been destroyed by the process of colonization. The orality of Native narratives, therefore, is a potential element that critics of Native literature need to explore in their analysis.

The Native American author Janet Campbell Hale also feels that her writing is created with the assistance of other forces:

> I don't get an idea for a story and then set about writing the story. I've got to let the story have its' own way. I see myself, then, as the servant of my fiction rather than as using my fiction as a vehicle to convey my predetermined "message". (Campbell Hale, 13)

According to Campbell Hale, her stories are not created out of her own preconceived ideas within her own mind. Rather, the role of the intellect is merely to control, select and reject information. The story itself

> ...is brewed in the unconscious. Fiction comes from the deeper, darker places in the writer's soul, the same place that dreams come from, and, as in the making of dreams, the unconscious makes use of bits and pieces as it weaves its tapestry. (Campbell Hale, 11)

Campbell Hale believes that although there are elements of her work that are autobiographical, these elements are integrated into other experiences in which her participation appears to be minimal at best - whether for example through viewing a TV program, or noticing children at play. The mind then acts as an editor, while the subconscious is in actuality the creator.

With these examples of the Native writing process in mind, it becomes easy to understand why Native authors such as Brant and Campbell Hale take issue with the labelling of their works as autobiographical. Brant's response to critics who are quick to judge her work as autobiographical is as follows:

> I do not believe that all writing is autobiographical or that a writer has to use words as a confessional. In fact, I think that type of writing is unique to white North America. (Brant, 118)

Campbell Hale also rejects the label of autobiographer even when it is demonstrated that instances in her character's lives are similar to her own personal experiences. For Campbell Hale, these parallels are not the result of her desire to write about herself. Rather, they should be viewed as one method, among many, that is used to provide the character and the story with "life and authenticity" (Campbell Hale, 6). Obviously, the European insistence on distinction of genres in literature is not necessarily relevant when applied to Native literatures.

The Eurocentric assumption that genres of Native literatures should coincide with, or conform to, the genres in English literature departments is particularly problematic when a non-Native student attempts to pursue studies in Native Literature. As an example, I was recently asked to help a student from France at the University of British Columbia who is having a difficult time finding biographical work on Native people. At first I was surprised by this request as I was immediately able to think of dozens of books dealing with Native lifestyles and experiences. Then I realized that what was preventing her from finding these materials was her own expectations of genre conformity and an assumption that communal and personal stories are told in the same way in Native and non-Native cultures. A search for books in non-Native bookstores, libraries or computer catalogues, under the category of autobiography or biography would result in minimal success. Conversely, if she learned about the differences in the techniques of portraying experiences in the story form in the different Native nations that she was studying, she would not only be able to locate more texts, but she would recognize that the term biography can not always be applied in the same way and with the same expectations as compared to non-Native texts. For example, the autobiographical writings of, Beatrice Culleton, Lee Maracle and Basil Johnston are frequently categorized as fiction. For non-Native critics it is difficult to conceive these texts as "real" experiences as they are created out of both the internal (mental, spiritual, emotional) and the external (documentable, physical) experiences of the author. Many Native people would not have the need to make this distinction.

In the process of trying to understand more about the Native Creative Writing processes, I asked some of the authors at En'owkin to discuss issues concerning their own writing. I was interested in whether or not they wrote with a particular audience in mind. Jeannette Armstrong perceives her audience as "Native People of this country who have been colonized" (JAI/95). When I inquired about the changes that she would have to make in her style of writing if she was to choose to write for non-Native audiences, she stated that her writing would have to be considerably more descriptive to compensate for the readers' lack of cultural knowledge. For example, she could no longer assume that the symbolic influence of common Native metaphors, such as an eagle or a feather, would be understood. Also, elements of Native lifestyles, such as cooperativeness and spirituality, would need a great deal more explanation. Armstrong's account of the amount of descriptive and explanatory analysis that would need to be incorporated into her work were she to target a non-Native readership demonstrates that the extent of cultural information that non-Native readers are unable to automatically access is both significant and is central to understanding her work. (See Chapter Two of this study for more specific examples of engaging in the process of culturally decoding Native literature).

Williams, author of ***The Black Ship***, the first in a series of science fiction novels, perceives his audience in this series as science fiction readers. Since the fans of this genre of writing are from various cultures, Williams' target audience is not a particular ethnic population. He chose this audience because he believes that this segment of the reading public enjoys thinking of new alternatives, ideas and approaches. Williams believes that these audiences are open to new ways of thinking and allow him a greater freedom of expression. Through engaging in this genre, Williams is able to thematically explore issues such as the effects of colonialism, the effect of a society's overemphasis on science and technology and the continuing value of tribal belief systems, all in the disguise of a non-threatening fantasy.

One quality of Williams' work that he specifically pointed out to me is the intentional use of language that is accessible. He intentionally set out to write at a grade eight comprehension level, as did other Native authors, such as Armstrong. Williams emphasized that this was in no way an easy task for him. His reason behind this decision was that he wanted to ensure that the book would be accessible to the majority of Native readers. He claims that authors who receive a lot of critical attention, such as N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Silko, do not write novels that are accessible or interesting to the average Native person. By using an easily comprehensible language, Williams defies the commonly held mainstream notion that works need to contain complicated terminologies and concepts in order to be considered intellectually valuable. However, the comments of mainstream academics who teach Native literature, such as Hoy on Culleton and Petrone on Slipperjack as elaborated on in Chapter One of this paper, demonstrate that this writing style can easily be perceived as both without academic merit and therefore be belittled or ignored.

Hill's writing, in her soon to be released book, is targeted at Native people who are in the process of healing and recovery. She provides healing tools to her readers by describing counselling techniques that have been developed specifically with issues of abuse and/or abandonment. In order to ensure the confidentiality of sacred healing techniques, Hill fictionalizes traditional teachings and ceremonies, but in a way that maintains the usefulness of these exercises. Hill's book is another example of a Native person's writing that does not easily fit into European genres. Initially, the book may appear to be a self-help book, but it also contains elements of fiction, and describes the use of cultural beliefs and practices that are not offensive to the traditions of particular tribes.

Cuthand was somewhat hesitant to respond to my question concerning her targeted audience. She told me that she hated questions concerning whether she wrote for a Native or non-Native audience. However, in a recently published interview that she did with Maria Campbell, Cuthand states:

> I don't write for white, mainstream Canadians. If they understand my work, that's fine, but if they don't, it doesn't matter. (Cuthand, 265)

In describing her conception of an audience, Cuthand related to me that she writes each poem with specific individuals in mind. Her target audience therefore changes from poem to poem.

Cuthand's reasons for writing have changed as she has moved through the stages of healing. As Cuthand describes in her published interview with Campbell:

> Sixteen, seventeen years ago we talked a lot about the healing power of the word and the importance of telling stories. That was then, this is now, and I think we've both moved away from that point. We've come to that place where we don't have to write to heal ourselves. (Cuthand, 268)

Ironically, the positive effects of her own healing jeopardized her career as a writer because she had to reconsider her motives for wanting to write. She is overcoming this dilemma by using the positive effects that have arisen out of going through the healing process as the primary motivators in her writing.

In my interviews with these authors, I was also interested in discussing what might be included and excluded from the developing categories and genres of Native literatures. I asked Armstrong whether inclusion could be based solely on the ethnicity of the writer. Armstrong was firm in stating that Native ancestry in no way validates writing as Native literature. She feels that the decision should be primarily based on the work itself and not the individual writer.

I then asked Armstrong that if a Native person can write non-Native literature whether the reverse would also be possible. Armstrong's response was that if a non-Native person employed the techniques of using a traditional structure as a framework for a story and has developed an understanding of the symbols, metaphors and belief systems of the tribe, in addition to maintaining a respect for the culture throughout this process, then it would be possible to include his/her writing within the category of a particular Native literature. However, she was quick to add that she has never encountered an example of this kind. Authors such as Kinsella "twisted, convoluted and Europeanized that format" (JAI/95). She calls Kinsella's work "a white man's fiction" lacking in creativity. According to Armstrong, he merely borrows certain aspects from Native communities and then applies them to a set prescription, a non-Native formula. In my interview with Williams he stated that, in his opinion, Kinsella's literature can not be considered Native. He believes that authors who incorporate elements of traditional stories and cultures into their own structures without the permission of a particular Nation are essentially abusively stealing from that culture.

Armstrong describes this type of appropriation as similar to the work of many foreign corespondents who enter another culture during a time of crisis, and in doing so believe they can accurately describe the events without sufficient historical, cultural or political knowledge. As a result, both the foreign journalist and the appropriator of Native culture are barely able to skim the surface of the issues they attempt to portray and convey.

In understanding what Armstrong means by appropriation, it is important to understand the concept of ownership of stories in Native communities. Armstrong states this concept straightforwardly: "Stories that belong to a nation, belong to a nation - period." (JAI/95). She says that the content of these stories needs to be preserved and protected. Anyone who resorts to appropriation, according to Armstrong, is "plagiaristic", "ignorant", "naive" and furthermore "is not creative and therefore not a writer" (JAI/95). Cuthand adds that valuing and respecting both the Nations and their stories is fundamental for Native writers to consider when they consider what is appropriate to include and exclude in their writing. Whether the stories fall under the categories of individual stories, family stories, or the stories of a community or Nation, Cuthand believes that getting permission to use the stories is always essential.

I was also very curious to find out how Armstrong felt about Wendy Wickwire's transcription of Henry Robinson's legends. Wickwire complied and edited this transcription that was published in 1989 under the title of ***Write It On Your Heart: The Epic World of an Okanagan Storyteller***. Armstrong and Robinson are from the same tribe and she studied Okanagan legends and traditions with him before his death. Therefore, I felt that she would be the ideal person to ask about this project as she is very familiar with Robinson's oratorical skills. Armstrong feels that Wickwire did a poor job of transcribing the legends Robinson told her. According to Armstrong, although Wickwire may have heard the words, she had no concept of the rhythm in his orature that develops, stretches and moves the story. Therefore, his mastery of the story was not demonstrated in this book. Armstrong was particularly upset when she saw Wickwire's "tinkering" with the format of the stories. Wickwire's transcription is a presentation of Robinson's stories in a form of verse that has no relationship whatsoever to the Okanagan culture. Armstrong believes that this was likely the result of Wickwire's attempt to depict her own version of the rhythm of Robinson's stories. Furthermore, Armstrong commented that the B.C. Book Prize shouldn't have been awarded to Wickwire for her effort ***Write It On Your Heart***, since her role in the book was merely one of a transcriber, and she was not a very good one at that.

As someone who has read Wickwire's book, and then at a later date had the opportunity to listen to the actual tapes that contained Robinson's direct renditions of the legends to Wickwire, I definitely agree that there is a lot lost in the Wickwire's written text. I am not familiar enough with the style and techniques of Okanagan verse to comment on Wickwire's choice of format. However, I am not convinced that any attempt at direct verbal transcription could bring out the humour, drama, and the numerous other nuances of Robinson's oratory. Furthermore, I believe that an attempt of this kind demonstrates a lack of respect for the capabilities and the power of the oral tradition. I believe this because true orature has far more depth and character, demonstrated through rhythm, gestures, sounds and tones, and that these qualities are impossible to translated effectively into writing. The written word becomes further destroyed when read by a lay person.

Throughout this study, I became continually convinced that in spite of the Eurocentric reverence for the written word, there is a limit to the extent that the act of writing in itself can function as a fruitful method of recording and conveying stories directly from the oral tradition into written literature. I was reminded of the separate experiences that I had as a child when before bedtime my mother would read me stories and, on other nights, my father would tell me legends. Both experiences were enjoyable, but in different ways. I had the privilege of having parents that were both gifted in the art of storytelling. However, I found that when my mother would read stories to me, it was a relaxing process. Whether through pictures or words, the images were fed to me in a manner that enabled me to easily conceive the story in my mind as I drifted off to sleep. My father however, found that when he would tell me legends, I would not be as easily coaxed into a restful state. Rather than lying down in a relaxing position, I would insist on sitting up cross legged in an alert position to enable myself to transfer his words, tones, stresses, and other nuances into vivid images in my mind. While literature provided me with a passive and relaxing access to a story, oratory provided me with an active and invigorating access to the story, as it directly engaged me as an individual and not a generic reader.

One of the other subjects that I was interested in discussing with the authors was language. It has been suggested by some critics that the category of Native literature is an anomaly, as (1) it is in the written format as opposed to the oral tradition, and (2) it employs English, obviously a non-Native language. As English is a tool of the colonizer, its use by Native authors can be seen as a concession. As Brant states:

> The written word, the bible book almost destroyed our faith in who we are, so, we have come to view the written word with suspicion and apprehension. (Brant, 50)

Brant's response to dealing with the written word and the language of the colonizer is to appropriate tools that have been forced on her and accordingly use them for her own purposes. Brant states:

> Because the language of the enemy was a weapon used to perpetuate racism and hate, I want to forge it in a new way, as a weapon of love. (Brant, 51)

From this perspective, Native writing in English can be seen as promoting cultural continuance and survival.

Nevertheless, English is not always an easy language for Native authors to use in communicating their thoughts. Williams states that "English is a peculiar language " (GWI/95). He believes that it is important to understand the mind set behind the language in order to use it effectively. For example, English, he believes, is "a self-oriented language", as it has evolved to convey individuals' perceptions of the world. This differs from Tribal languages that focus on conveying community learning processes and thought. Furthermore, he feels that the nature of colonization and appropriation inherent in the English language is demonstrated by the fact that English embodies an amalgamation of other languages.

Armstrong believes that the different world views embodied in Native and non-Native languages are revealed in the voice of the authors. She believes that there is a significant difference in the styles of writing of those Native authors who speak their Native language and those who do not. Cuthand has different ideas on this subject. Although Cuthand does not speak Cree, her Native language, she was raised in an environment where she heard a lot of Cree spoken. Cuthand describes the effect that she believes this influence has had on her writing:

> My poetry is used in Native Literature classes as an example of the crossover from Cree language because there are a lot of Cree concepts and metaphors in my poetry. This has been pointed out to me by Cree speaking graduate students and senior students who have analyzed my poetry and told me about my own use of these Cree styles and techniques. My initial reaction

> was "Whoa, where did that come from?" Now I attribute it to Ancestral memory, that lineage memory that resides in us. When we get to our creative centre, we draw on this resource. Language therefore is a tool for expressing that centre of light that is within us all. (BCI/95)

Hill also does not speak her Native Mohawk language. However, she has noticed that in some ways her writing demonstrates an influence of the Mohawk style of speech. She has found that she has a strong tendency to write in the passive voice, a style that is frequently employed in Mohawk speech. The effect of communicating in this mode of speech is to place the emphasis on the object rather than the subject, de-emphasizing the perspective of the individual and emphasizing the act itself.

Although there may be other explanations that the academic community might prefer to use in explaining this carry over of Native terms and styles incorporated into the transition from one language to another, it is evident that traditional styles and techniques have survived the imposition of English. Furthermore, it appears that the styles and techniques are employed at times by Native authors without their conscious knowledge. It follows that the concept of Ancestral Memory is not one that should be easily ignored or dismissed. The concept of Ancestral Memory raises many important issues about personal identity and genetic history.

George firmly believes that the connection between Contemporary Native authors and their ancestors is not lost. He feels that knowledge continues to be passed down from generation to generation and writing is a significant modern agent that fosters this process. Therefore, according to George, there are strong links between the oral tradition and Contemporary Native writing.

However, writing in English creates some problems and burdens for the Native Creative writer whose first language is not English. One significant problem is the difficulty in translating Native concepts into English. As Brant explains:

> When I sit in front of my typewriter, there are times I literally cannot find the words that will describe what I want to say. And this is because the words I "hear", are Mohawk words. (Brant, 51)

This difficulty in the process of translation demonstrates that English is not necessarily an ideal tool to convey Native cultural information. This leaves the English reader at a constant disadvantage in spite of the level of his or her understanding of the English terminology employed to convey the Native concepts, beliefs and systems with Native texts.

Cuthand provided me with a particularly useful tip related to surviving as a writer in the mainstream academic system. I asked her what Armstrong had meant by this quote in the preface of Cuthand's book of poetry, ***Voices in the Waterfall:***

> A certain university professor once made rude remarks about my English. But he doesn't know I found out that it is not English. I found out what language is for. Keep in mind they fear that. (Armstrong, 11)

Cuthand explained to me that language can be used as a form of power in the academia in an attempt to silence the voices of competing or conflicting beliefs. If a student presents an argument in what is considered poor grammar in the academic setting, the contents of the paper can be easily dismissed as emanating from an unqualified perspective. This insistence on linguistic accuracy is merely another example of the attempt of the colonizer to silence the colonized according to Cuthand. Therefore, maintaining one's own language usage is not only a form of resistance to this process, but an insistence that the issues - not the style - are the topics that need to be addressed.

I was interested in Armstrong's thoughts on the development of Native analysis of Native literatures. She emphasized that this form of analysis had not taken full shape at this point. Her own attempt to engage in the development of the process is her involvement as editor of ***Looking at the Words of Our People***, an anthology discussed at length in the previous chapter. Armstrong is concerned with developing opportunities for Native people to engage in the critical analysis process. Through this process, she hopes that new critical frameworks can be developed that could be used to foster new approaches to the study of literature. Armstrong emphasized that this process should not only consist of an exercise in complicated critical and theoretical analysis, but a centering on the perhaps more relevant study of how "we look at the words of our people" (JAI/95). She emphasized the need for more Native people who are relatively free of the constraints of the Western view to enter into this process in order to develop their own vocabulary for the purposes of dialogue and debate. This would lead to a contribution to Native literatures that would have the potential to influence and affect outside communities, such as mainstream Native literature classes. Furthermore, this process will lead to the liberation of Native literature from the mainstream critical analysis currently being applied to Native works.

Armstrong was firm in stressing that I recognize Native literature as much more than a homogeneous category. She believes that it is more accurate to use a classification that recognizes the existence of many Native literatures. The process of analyzing Native literatures than involves adjusting one's:

> ...scope to be able to see the literature from the specific
> cultural view and context and then find a critical analysis
> to be able to read from that view. (JAI/95)

As this process is developed and utilized, a style of criticism specifically intended for Native literature that would be more relevant to the interests and needs of Native authors, critics and readers may then come to be respected within the academic community. The premise at the base of this construct implies a challenge to the current critical system in use.

Another likely result of this process is the formal recognition of new genres. One specific example that Armstrong provided is the recognition of a category entitled Liberation Literature - a literature arising out of a colonized voice. Unlike postcolonial literature, that is perceived by many mainstream theories as "Writing back" as a form of resistance to the colonizers, Liberation literature focuses on the concern of many Native writers in addressing the issues of social and political change within Native communities. Once this genre is recognized, a new form of analysis will need to be conceived to address the issues relating specifically to this group of texts. Furthermore, the recognition of Liberation literature and the framework of analysis established to analyze this genre may also be useful in considering the literature of writers of other ethnicities who focus on issues of underprivileged classes.

Greg Young-Ing emphasized that Native literature should not be considered a sub group of Canadian writing. Rather, these literatures should be considered as a distinct brand of literature outside the classifications of European literature. He suggests that many Native authors (i.e. Highway, Brant, Taylor, etc.) employ dialects that further differentiate them from the grouping within the category of English Canadian writers. These dialects are coming to be recognized as "Red or Rez English" (GYII/95).

One of the most exciting aspects in the emergence of Native criticism of Native literatures will be the presentation of individual and perhaps at times opposing views concerning Native literatures among Native people. At En'owkin, I found that when I asked Armstrong and Young-Ing about the work of Thomas King, I was presented with two differing views. Armstrong enjoys King's literature and believes that although King is not Blackfoot, the pacing and structure of his stories are appropriate to the style of that Nation. Also, Armstrong feels that because the content in King's stories is fictionalized, he is not guilty of appropriating the stories of the Blackfoot people. Young-Ing, however, believes that King is a "token Indian" in the Canadian writing community. He believes that King's writing is geared towards non-Native audiences and subsequently, his literature does not have a "strong Native content" (GYII/95). Differing opinions and beliefs in Native analysis, such as those briefly demonstrated by Armstrong and Young-Ing's perspectives, will help to shatter the prevailing image in mainstream society of a singular and Native approach and/or perspective.

Looking towards new approaches to understanding Native literatures also involves a reconsideration of the value of professional labels that are taken for granted in non-Native society. In the roles that Armstrong plays, she could be labelled as a novelist, a poet, an environmentalist, an advocate of social and political rights, a teacher, a translator, an administrator, etc. When I asked Armstrong whether she feels that she is extending herself too far in her pursuits, she responded that she is constantly surprised when this question is raised since she does not see these roles as individual and separate from each other. She does not classify herself in Western secularized occupational terms. This, Armstrong believes, would imply that these acts are based on the requirements of a job (e.g., teacher) or of an intellectual pursuit (e.g., an environmentalist). Instead, she looks at her actions as being a natural part of her involvement with her family, community, land, etc. Armstrong finds it difficult to understand how other people can allow themselves to be less involved than she is in areas related to their own relationships as human beings. Native literature is but one of the many facets that Armstrong believes is related to both her own identity and her relationship with her community. She may not have a graduate degree in English literature, but I have learned more from her about how to approach the study of Native literature that I have from the numerous academics that I have read in my career as a graduate student. I am forced to conclude that one of the results of the healthy development and the sincere recognition of Native literature and frameworks of Native analysis may be a decrease in the importance of titles (i.e. professor, Ph.D., etc.) and more of a focus on ability and action, at least in this particular area of study.

This study skims the surface of the issues concerning Native literatures that may arise in the future. Williams predicts with some certainty that a new group of writers will emerge within the next twenty years to establish fields of Native literatures beyond the space that Native writing currently is assigned by the mainstream academic environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this study I have attempted to demonstrate why I believe that the study of Native literature necessitates the development and recognition of a culturally relevant approach. I have tried to accomplish this objective by analyzing problematic approaches towards the analysis of Native literature by non-Native critics, by examining both the developing field of Native analysis of Native literature and perspective on how these approaches differ in content and style from the non-Native analysis previously discussed, and finally through discussing the issues of Native literature with some Native authors and teachers. Naturally this paper can not be considered a thorough study of all the materials available on these subjects. However, through a consideration of materials that I have selected to explore in this study, I believe that some important insights can be gained regarding both the need for changes in the way that English departments in mainstream universities administer the teaching of Native literature as well as the necessity of increased support for Native writers and academics through the act of working together as a Native community within the academic environment, at the local, national and international levels.

Academic institutions clearly need to do more than merely adding the occasional Native text to their pre-existing and pre-structured courses. It is essential that Native literature be analyzed with materials produced by Native people that relate to the specific issues of the texts being studied. Native guest speakers can also serve this function. If the university is unable or unwilling to hire Native professors to teach Native literature, then there should at least be some attempt to provide training for non-Native professors. This training should address the issues of recognizing how their own academic and/or Eurocentric assumptions obstruct their understanding and teaching of the Native text, and should include the opportunity to learn about specific cultural approaches to specific texts in order to demonstrate the layers of meaning that are incorporated into Native literature. Ideally, these courses would be taught by Native authors, teachers, critics, etc., and taught outside of the university setting. Finally, there needs to be viable avenues available for Native students who are feeling silenced, excluded or oppressed by the teaching practices or classroom dynamics involved in the present teaching of Native literature.

The other important conclusion that I feel that this study has supported is the real need for developing community links between Native writers and academics. Speaking from the perspective of a Native English student, I feel that the need for this development is strong as we are largely excluded from a connection with our academic peers who are pursuing the more "legitimate" and acceptable areas of study. Furthermore, we are separated from our Native communities by a distance that is created not only out of proximity, but also through the process of getting a mainstream education. The development of these kinds of communities would not only be positive for the Native students, but would also have a positive impact on the development of their work.

As an individual trying to change the system from within, I can verify that this venture can be a lonely, daunting and discouraging task. However, I am more convinced that as a group, Native writers and academics together would stand a better chance of effecting change out of the exchanges inherent in the spirit of community. As I continue the struggle of surviving in the academic world, I will keep this vision of change and growth in mind as a goal for the future.

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INTERVIEWS

All interviews are recorded and are available by request.

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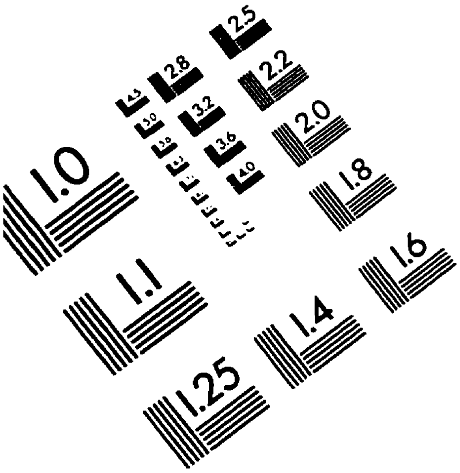

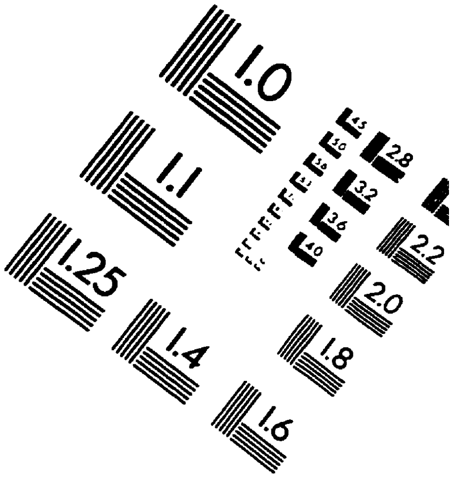

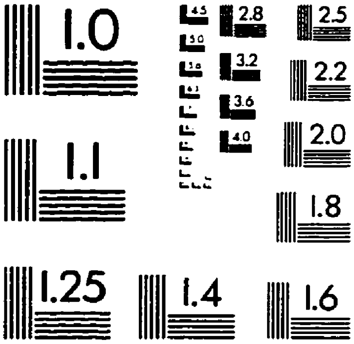

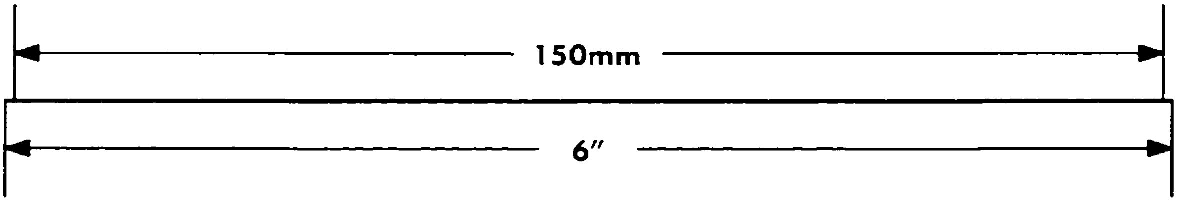

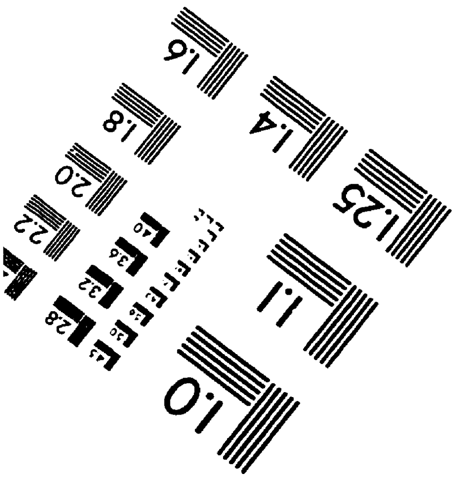

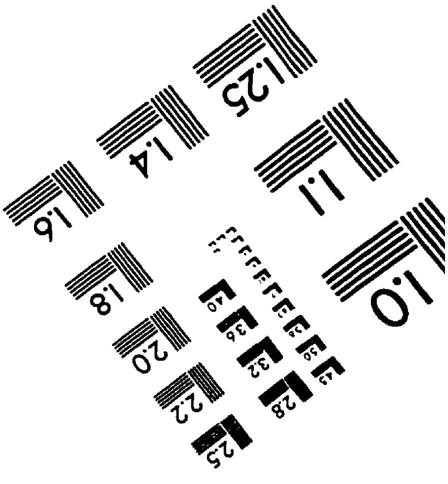

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