

REVIEW ESSAY

Native Writers and Canadian Writing: Canadian Literature Special Issue, ed. W.H. New, Editor. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990, 306 pages, no index, ISBN 0-7748-0371

What is a 'Native' voice? A meaningless question to which there is an equally banal answer: it is anything uttered by anyone who declares him or herself Native. What makes this collection and the current literary and intellectual scene so interesting is that many such voices are interesting and significant in whatever terms with which they are scrutinized; 'Native' has increasingly less significance as the sometimes lone yardstick that warrants listening.

Native Writers and Canadian Writing is a special UBC Press co-publication with the literary journal *Canadian Literature*. As well as the introduction by editor W. H. New, it contains 19 articles by 18 authors (Basil Johnston has two brief contributions), 36 poems (but no prose fiction, unless Johnston's 'Indian myth', Lee Maracle's autobiographical excerpt, and Shirley Bear's 'scholarly' piece are considered fiction) by 16 authors, and 2 review articles-in brief, a 3 page table of contents for a 306 page book. It is inevitable that there be high and low points in such a vast and heterogeneous collection. On the whole, the book is a fascinating and worthwhile presentation. It is an examination of an emerging consciousness that is highly articulate-the pieces by Native writers show more maturity vis-a-vis 'White' culture and less desire to be bitterly introspective, and most of the scholarly articles demonstrate a less narrow-minded approach than I frankly expected. I should state at the outset that the length of this review, argumentative and nitpicking as it might be in places, is a tribute to the overall excellence of the scholarship evinced by the book; my praise for the examples of Native writing therein contained, however, is somewhat less unconditional.

Editor New perhaps inadvertently sums up the (hidden?) point of view of this collection when he refers (p.7) to Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (Ojibwa) and her evaluation of Indian voices in a predominantly White world; she rejects the way non-Natives sometimes try to construct Native voices since by speaking for the other they co-opt the other. They construct, to borrow Eric Wolf's phrasing, a people without (cultural) history. New interprets Keeshig-Tobias as suggesting that the other, the people on the margins of Western society, must participate in the mainstream in order to construct their own image(s), to make their own voice(s) heard by creating a receptive ground for complex concepts, descriptions and attitudes that are

fundamentally non-western. Yet rarely in the volume is the role of language in creating such participation explored (the exception is Bentley's contribution). The language is English (French is hardly considered here), not only the language of the colonisers but a world language as well. By the same measure, therefore, are the emerging voices 'Indian'? Is there an 'Indian' reality outside the context created for 'Indian' by a 17th, 18th, and 19th century colonizing mentality (and a late 20th century liberal-patronizing one)? Or perhaps I should ask, is there an 'Indian' reality for Whites-the Native voices presumably know what they are. Any confusion that emerges arises during the Native (mis)appropriation of White cultural instruments; some essays (not all by Native people) try to create an 'Indian' voice by denigrating the White 'Other'.

And this is one of the problems with some of the contributions here: they are as biased as the writings and attitudes they take to task. Mingwôn Mingwôn's (Shirley Bear) "Equality among Women" is particularly offensive in this regard as well as completely out of place in this collection; it nowhere discusses writing, and if it is included as an example of a Native writer, then all the more reason to leave it out. (Celia Haig-Brown's "Border Work" is another piece that has nothing to do with writing, and she admits that she is White and from "bourgeois English origins" [p.229]; another puzzling inclusion). Bear takes some potted psychology, sociology, and anthropology, the latter presumably from Barbara G. Walker's *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, the only reference besides the Merriam-Webster dictionary and a completely gratuitous reference to a fatuous 'quote' from Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop*(1989)("In the beginning was thought, and her name was woman...to her we owe our lives" [ellipsis in the original]), all of which manages to sound no more edifying than some suburban consciousness-raising-sharing-networking group, and all to reprise the old and regrettably not quite dead 'matriarchy (in this essay often confused with matrilineality) was first' argument. "Paternalism was at its beginnings in the religions and governments around the time of the ninth century," (p.134) suggests Bear (by citing Walker). What religion? Whose? What governments? Where? Apart from the fact that the assertion is wildly inaccurate if Bear is referring to western European paternalism (western-meaning 'our'-paternalism, in the sense of male appropriation of most aspects of political power, probably had its beginnings in the Roman patri-clan, to the point that the *pater* held power of life and death over members of his household, even in Imperial times), the statement also creates a Stalinist re-writing of history by suggesting that everything remotely western is a leprous excrescence that reeks of decay and rot, not to mention paternalism and male sexism and Eurocentricism and White racism and ruling class-centredism, and so on-ism. With only several hundred words, Bear (p.134) manages to dismiss a good 200 or so years of Egyptology (for example, "early writings from Egypt depict a matrilineal society, with strong clans led by women", another

Walker reference), 100 years of anthropology ("In the pre-Columbian governments in North America, women were the power": some pre-Columbian cultures seem to have possessed more than a touch of misogyny, political systems of control are hardly 'governments' and 'positions' is hardly the word to use in reference to the social systems of most Athabaskan, Algonkian, and Siouan-speaking peoples), and English semantics ("oral documents") in her eagerness to create a new mythology that condenses to Western = bad (sexist, etc.), non-Western = good.

In a subtler way (although infinitely better argued than Bear's contribution), Robin Ridington's interesting presentation ("Cultures in Conflict: The Problem of Discourse") of some aspects of a court case involving Cree and Dunne-za (Beaver) people against the Government of Canada also flirts with revisionism and myth-making. Ridington allows Dunne-za people to speak for themselves through long citations taken from a conference that examined the Government's incomprehension of Dunne-za land use and ownership in discursive form (not in the sense of 'register' that many writers in this collection use). Ridington does not transpose Dunne-za declarations into educated White English. (I use 'discursive' in the sense used by Benveniste (1971) and Ricoeur (1971), that discourse is marked by 'you' and the demonstrative 'that'-it is based on personal knowledge of the other-whereas legal-speak, for example, although a restricted register, requires both the I and the Other to share objectified, third-party knowledge). Although Ridington rightly argues that Dunne-za discourse is fundamentally different than the kind of register accepted and required in court-rooms and which finds its voice in 'official' (ideologically 'purified') Euro-Canadian and western histories, he subverts his own position by attempting a discursive (is he appropriating a Dunne-za voice?) and self-reflexive presentation. For example, he notes "You are reading...in a journal called Canadian Literature "You can read and write..." "you have read what I have written..." (p.288) "You be the judge" (p.289). He also simultaneously interpolates the recitations of Gerry Attachie (Dunne-za plaintiff) with his own biased interpretations: "Gerry [Attachie] made four important and related points in his concluding remarks: 1) The Dunne-za and Cree established peaceful relations with one another long ago. They did so as sovereign nations" (p.287). Mr. Attachie's words can certainly be construed in favour of the first assertion, but the second-true or not-is strictly Ridington's, not Attachie's. "When the whitemen came, Indians provided for them from the store of their accumulated knowledge" (p.287) and "You can remember that [John Davis's, a Dunne-za Elder] people helped the early fur traders" (p.288). This ignores what Mr. Attachie perhaps felt was too self-evident or too embedded to mention: the Dunne-za and other people generally fed European traders in exchange for trade goods. Ridington's interpretation of Mr. Attachie's words makes the first 200 years of the competitive and sometimes bloody fur trade seem like a pleasant afternoon tea get-

together between friends. In fact, however, sometime in the early 1800s the Beaver were one of the few Native groups with enough anger or nerve to kill 4 or 5 fur traders, at old Fort St. John, causing the post to be relocated and trade temporarily suspended. Note the upper-case "Indian" and lower-case "whitemen", and the familiar (and pseudo-discursive) "Gerry". In brief, Mr. Attachie's and the other plaintiffs' declarations can be interpreted as a 'true' account of Dunne-za - Canadian government relations in September 1945 (the date of the land transfer that led to the dispute). On the other hand, they can just as easily be seen as a product structured by existing Dunne-za discourse, as Dunne-za people periodically attempt to re-examine and re-create a historical base within the limitations of discourse, so that new forms can be 'discovered' and legitimated to deal with a rapidly changing Euro-Canadian socio-political situation that is marked by non-discursive registers. However, Ridington's repetition (at least 5 times on pp.287 and 288) that the Dunne-za helped the White traders can only be interpreted as a case of special pleading.

Parker Duchemin's " 'A Parcel of Whelps': Alexander Mackenzie Among the Indians" is another case in point, a well-argued and certainly entertaining analysis of the sub-text (meaning, I think, assumptions) underlying Mackenzie's famous accounts of his voyages of exploration in 1789 and 1793. The article thoroughly documents Mackenzie's racist, colonizing (orientalizing of the Occident? See Said [1979] who seems to have had a major influence on many of the authors here), evolutionist and objectifying attitudes. Mackenzie's text treated Native people in a patronizing manner that reduced them to potential consumers of European trade goods. This, says Duchemin (p.63), lends "...powerful support to [Mackenzie's] textual *strategies* of domination" (my emphasis). Yet Duchemin has done no more (very ably, though) than situate Mackenzie in a particular European social context and temporal moment: he was a man of his times and treated non-Europeans (and very likely all non-British) as socially and politically inferior (though an implication runs throughout Duchemin's quotes that Mackenzie did not believe in separate humanities and insuperable divisions between races; as an 18th century and fairly well-educated Scot, he was unlikely to have done so; this aspect is unexamined here). To say that Mackenzie followed a "strategy" of domination and conveniently not to make mention of the fact that he was an employee of and partner in trading concerns most of his adult life (he was knighted for his commercial efforts, after all) is in itself a strategy to reduce Mackenzie's mercantilist mentality to (at best) a kind of Colonial Office paternalism or (at worst) blighted racism. The fact that he described Indians, in Duchemin's words, as existing " ...in a world empty of spirit, governed by contradictory and repulsive customs ..." (p.68) does not mean that Mackenzie had an "*ideologically* distorted" (Ibid, my emphasis again) view, but merely a materialist, culturally-situated and admittedly limited one. Yet at least Mackenzie was coherently materialist. At the hands of

Duchemin's pen, Mackenzie emerges as slightly racist, slightly contemptuous of Native people, but highly determined in his entrepreneurial mission, and so it hardly seems fair to blame him for being ethnographically shallow. One can hardly fault someone for not doing something they never intended to do. One cannot congratulate Mackenzie on his imperialist quest-and this is Duchemin's commendable de-mythologizing task-but students might profitably read Lewis and Clark's journal of a similar voyage and count the number of dead Native bodies left behind.

Not all the contributions to this volume are similarly biased. D.M.R. Bentley, in "Savage, Degenerate, and Dispossessed: Some Sociological, Anthropological, and Legal Backgrounds to the Depiction of Native Peoples in Early Long Poems on Canada" traces much the same itinerary as Duchemin in sensitively analyzing exactly what the long title announces. Other than scholars, and unlike Mackenzie's journal, which finds its way into Canadian school curricula across the country, no one is today interested in this mediocre and smug 'praise-the-empire, thank-you-God-for-making-me-White' poetry:

...mankind, the forest's ancient Lords
Pitch'd their light tents, and told their savage hordes;
Of sex regardless-rushing from afar,
With brethren clans to wage eternal war! (p.82)

and so on, for thousands of lines. Yet Bentley uses the analysis as a base from which to ask a salient question, a question that must be central to any critical enterprise coloured by political aims (and all of them are, according to the followers of Foucault and Derrida):

In our own day, several poets and critics have attempted to penetrate the stereotypes and abstractions that have included the indigenes in Canada, but have any of them done more (this essay certainly has not) than assemble archives of misrepresentation? With all their emphasis on deconstructing metaphysical assumptions, have the practitioners of post-modernism and post-structuralism helped to reify the native peoples of Britain's ex-colonies, or have they once more denied them a real presence in the world that matters-the world, now, of words, and words, moreover, in the great imperial languages of the modern age? How much better is it to be described as an indigene rather than as a savage? The question will be real if it reaches its intended audience. (p.88)

No answer is forthcoming, and, as Clifford Geertz states (1989:144), perhaps no answer is possible:

Such a construction of such a [common] ground [between the writers and the subjects of study], now that easy assumptions about the convergence of interests among peoples (sexes, races, classes, cults, ...) of unequal power have been historically exploded and the very possibility of unconditioned description has come into question, does not look nearly so straightforward an enterprise as it did when hierarchy was in place and language weightless.

Bentley's sensitivity to Geertz's problematic is typical of many of the approaches in this collection, even if sometimes left implicit, a good sign, after all, that something has taken root.

Mary Lu MacDonald covers much the same territory, and shares Bentley's predilection for long titles, in "Red & White Men; Black, White and Grey Hats: Literary Attitudes to the Interaction between European and Native Canadians in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century". Apart from tracing European (Indian as the Noble Savage) and American (Indians As The Bloodthirsty Torturers of Captives when Americans were expanding their frontiers, Indians Are Our Friends when they were not) influences on Canadian attitudes towards Indians (and even then Canadians struggled between the two cultures), MacDonald also notes (p.94) that there was outright borrowing from travel and early ethnological literature, a lot of it from Henry Schoolcraft (who has had an undeserved influence on later scholarship as well; see my *Images in Stone* [Rome: ArtCenter, 1989] in reference to later anthropological analyses of Algonkian rock art). MacDonald traces an interesting aspect of the early Canadian tropes as they developed and enveloped Indians; it was only later (after the 1840s) that the image of the 'bad Indian' developed. Earlier, though, all the modern imagery is already in place: The Noble Savage, The Friend of The Whiteman, The Perfectable Indian Who Wants Only Religion and Schooling To Become One of Us (But Knows His Place), the At One With The Forest (or The Universe) Indian. It all sounds distressingly modern and is in its way a call for further research into the mechanism by which such stereotypes become so thoroughly and persistently rooted. For scholars, MacDonald includes a bibliography of literary works about or referring to Indians in the period 1817-1850 that is, as far as I can tell, complete.

Alanna Kathleen Brown's "Mourning Dove's Canadian Recovery Years, 1917-1919" is a sensitive treatment of the issue of anthropological 'truth' versus the 'ethnographic faithfulness of (relatively) unfiltered oral tradition. The latter is represented by Mourning Dove's (Christine Quintasket, b.1882?, Okanagan?) "recreation in imperfect English" (p.119)

of legends of her people, and even here Brown is adept at suggesting the extent to which Mourning Dove's uncertain 'Indian' identity (her father or grandfather may have been White, Okanagan, or Lake, her mother Colville, paternal grandmother Nicola) and turbulent life (she nearly died from illness; she was only semi-literate, to judge by the letters reproduced here) may have played a large part in forging a nonetheless authentic 'Native' literary voice. On the other hand, 'anthropological truth' is represented by well-known anthropologist James Teit (a student of Franz Boas who salvaged-some say created-much of the anthropological descriptions of Plateau cultures), who Mourning Dove saw as a rival to her own efforts to collect her "folklores". Clearly the opposition between the two (there is no evidence that Teit acknowledged her existence, and I remember nothing in Teit's works referring to her) was deeper than Mourning Dove's resentment of Teit's paying-and "spoiling", as Mourning Dove wrote-the Indians with \$5.00 for a good yarn. There is a hint that Mourning Dove's real calling was writing works of literature (p.118) and that she was pushed into collecting *Coyote Stories* (1933) by a White friend and mentor. Surely the complex relationship with her ancestry, psychological dependency on a White mentor, and vacillation regarding the collection and recording of her cultural heritage all played a part in creating a modern 'Indian' voice that is every bit as legitimate-perhaps even more so-than later Native writers. This article is one of the highlights of the collection.

Robin McGrath's "Reassessing Traditional Inuit Poetry" and Robert Bringhurst's "That Also is You: Some Classics of Native Canadian Literature" are informative, well-written, and do not appear to have anything else as their goal than making sense of their subject matters (or making the marginalized Other accessible to the mainstream, using a commonplace idiom in the book). Mr. McGrath is particularly brave to have tackled such a difficult subject (though he is aided, he admits, by Knud Rasmussen's marvellous translations) and should be congratulated for what is one of the first intelligent appreciations of Inuit poetry that moves beyond mere thematic contrasts with English. The examples of poetry offered in the article often speak with a universal voice that crosses barriers of time and culture.

The editor, New, should perhaps have realized that many of these poems, even though rooted in a deeply shamanistic world view-the Inuit believed that if they got the words right, certain outcomes would follow (p.27)-shame many of the examples of contemporary Native poems in the volume: Joan Crate's "The Blizzard of My Name" (p.18) and moving "Negative of You" (p.16) are two wonderful exceptions, yet the latter poem has no thematic or prosodic references to anything identifiably 'Native'. Many poems-Lee Maracle's "Yin Chin", Wayne Keon's "Earth Nites", Emma LaRoque's "The Red in Winter" and "Progress", Jim Tallosi's "Belugas" and "Four Dancers", Frank Conibear's "Artifacts", to name a

few-have no more going for them than a mishmash of sprung rhythms and haphazard verse and stanza structure coupled to indifferent, cliched, and nostalgic 'Native' imagery, and some, like Alootook Ipellie's "The Dancing Sun" and "The Water Moved an Instant Before", wallow in it and risk making the result infantile or virtually inaccessible to non-specialist readers: " 'I'm a happy sun', he would say. 'Come dance with me.'" (p.272). Conibear in particular seems to take straight pedantic prose, e.e. cummings-ify it by removing upper case letters and hitting the "Centre Text" function keys on his computer, while LaRocque, Tallosi, Keon and Daniel David Moses ("Song on Starling Street", "Breakdown Moon") simply force the language into rigid verse structures that leave the rhythm bouncing around in a meaningless staccato counterpoint to dreamy and depressing imagery-but maybe this is the contradictory point these poets are aiming at. Some poems (Rita Joe's "Klu 'skap-o'kom" and "The Dream was the Answer") are just downright bad prose slapped together into a meaningless and disconnected verse structure that incidentally needs translator's and editor's notes (supplied by the author) to follow the meaning. Yet a few (LaRoque's "Nostalgia", Ben Abel's "Nightmare Comfort", Bruce Chester's "The Wet" and "Working on Titles" (but not his "Eagles Caught Salmon"), and especially Thomas King's coyote poems and notably "The City on the Hill") manage a degree of irony and humour or perhaps just shared humanity that make them serious contenders for mainstream consideration. Mingwôn Mingwôn's "April 2-3 1985 Aboriginal Rights Conference" is as puerile and facile as her prose contribution. Inconsistent is the best word to describe Daniel David Moses: "Blue Moon" (unlike his poems I referred to above) manages to tame the verse structure to favour the meaning, and "Inukshuk" is a victory of imagery and language over the political undercurrents that not surprisingly mark and sometimes mar a lot of the poetry here:

The wind wants at them-at
 least to stop each niche up,
 How long can you stand it,
 that song, the cold, the stones
 that no longer hold you

up now that they hold you
 down? Soon the migrations
 recommence. How steady
 are you? Dreams, so they say,
 also sing on the wing. (p.241)

Surely these sample verses, with punctuated and verse- and stanza-structured interruptions and forced line-end hesitations that are nonetheless overcome by thematically-unifying contrasts ("hold you/up",

"hold you/down") and fluid interplay of trochic and iambic rhythms ("... are you. Dreams, so they say, also sing on the wing.") deserve a wider audience than they will probably receive.

Publicizing Native voices is also a theme in Bringhurst's resuscitation of two Haida story-tellers, Walter McGregor and John Sky, whose stories were captured by anthropologist John Swanton before the last of Haida glory passed on with the death of 90% of the population in a series of epidemics. The article not only makes stirring reading about how anthropological fieldwork can be handled (and this is 1900 and 1901!) but also gives due praise to two master story-tellers whose talents, if we read Bringhurst's interpretation of their work presented at the beginning and end of the piece, make them deserving of serious consideration in any critical enterprise. Bringhurst's stylistic analysis of a brief sample (p.42) makes it clear that the Haida were not merely talking when telling these stories. In an effort to deservedly praise the Haida story-tellers, Bringhurst sometimes exaggerates by stating that the two were contemporaries of Darwin, Yeats, Van Gogh, and so on (p.37-38). Surely this is a case of misappropriating the more usual definition of 'contemporary', implying as it does a linkage stronger than temporal co-existence. But this is a quibble; Bringhurst brings the imagery of the two men to life without trying to 'speak for' Haida (and, as Bringhurst says, that aspect of Haida culture has long been silenced). Unfortunately, his call for more serious study and integration of Native poetic traditions into White school and university curriculums is likely to fall on unreceptive grounds in the Free Trade Epoch of Mulroney's Canada.

"Lines and Circles: The 'Rez' Plays of Tomson Highway" by Denis W. Johnston is a cogent analysis of themes and structures in a Native talent. As is nearly always the case when one analyzes talent, Johnston (perhaps unintentionally) reveals the playwright as a person who only happens to make use of the imagery his personal history has given him. (Highway's first language is Cree; he worked for several years in Native organizations; ultimately, Highway tames and transcends that history.) I say 'perhaps' unintentionally' because Johnston, while heaping merited praise on the plays, seems to accept Highway's analytical terms a little too uncritically. Highway is cited as saying (and it is accepted) that Cree is funny, visceral and genderless, three fundamental differences with English (p.255). Funny is in the eye or ear of the beholder or listener; what upper-class Englishman takes a broad Australian accent seriously? If Tomson and his Boswell think 'visceral' means 'dirty' and scatological instead of 'instinctive' (they do think so, in fact), then they might profitably re-read Highway's own dramatic diatribe from *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* cited on page 261. It would sound right at home in some Mackenzie, Timmins, Pouce Coupe or east-end Toronto beer hall around midnight. And apart from a very few words like 'actress', it is news to me that English attaches gender to its nouns except in paralinguistic and nearly undecipherable

formulas that are common to all languages (cars and hotels are feminine in English when replaced by pronouns, vaginas are masculine in French, and Fatherland is feminine in Italian, though the Italians thankfully get vagina right: it is feminine). One disturbing element to Highway's two plays (the other is *The Rez Sisters*) analyzed here (pp.262, 263) is the upbeat and optimistic mood of women compared to the pessimism and almost masochistic powerlessness of the men. Both plays involve some of the same characters and are situated on the same fictional Indian reserve, although one is centred on women, the other on men. Divergent and sex-specific reactions to reserve torpor and hopelessness seem to be more common on Canadian reserves than we admit, and this is perhaps one Cree or 'Native' orientation that Highway unconsciously reflects in his work.

This theme is also alluded to (though not developed) in Noel Elizabeth Currie's "Jeannette Armstrong & the Colonial Legacy", an examination of Armstrong's novel *Slash*. What is more interesting and perhaps significant in this article (and in the related "Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette Armstrong's 'Slash' and Beatrice Culleton's 'April Raintree', by Margery Fee) is the monolithic image of European ideology and society that is projected. For example, Currie refers to (and accepts) for purposes of her own argument) Gunn Allen's view of the colonial mission:

...Gunn Allen argues...the attempts at cultural genocide of gynocratic tribal peoples were and are in part attempts to destroy gynocracy: racism and sexism are inseparable in the initial and continuing European assumptions about Native peoples. (p.140)

And Currie refers to education and the Church:

Internalized oppression [I think she means our old friend Marx's 'false consciousness'], the result of the indoctrination of the colonized in their deficiencies as defined by the colonizers ...which allow the colonizers to justify and maintain their superior position (Memmi 79) [Albert Memmi, 1967], can be more damaging than material forms of oppression. Education is a vital tool by which the colonizers put their definitions of the colonized ("homogenized into a collective 'they' " [Pratt 139]) [Mary Louise Pratt, 1985] into the heads of the colonized. The result is that everyone 'recognizes' the inadequacy of the colonized relative to the colonizers; the educational system, like the political and economic systems, is structured to maintain that inadequacy. (p.140)

While Fee refers to, well, the world:

Most white accounts of indigenous people have simply reinscribed the oppressive dichotomy these novels are trying to displace, as demonstrated most recently by Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation: The Image the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literature*, [McGill-Queen's U. Press] 1989, and by Gilles Thérien for Quebec in "L'Indien Imaginaire: Une Hypothèse" (1987) [*Recherches Amerindiennes au Quebec* 17(3):3-21]. Thus it 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. As Harold Cardinal points out [Cardinal, 1977], Indian people have trouble dealing with the response of white people that if they are not satisfied with their place in Canada, they don't want to be Canadian: "In Canada there is no...universally accepted definition of the concept of Canadianism. There is no easy, sure national identity for Canada or for Canadians. When the question, 'You do want to be a Canadian, you don't want to be something else?' is asked it's always immensely difficult for an individual or a group to answer, because so much depends on the questioner's concept of Canadianism" Canadians in the "normal" sense of "real white people" have defined themselves reactively, for the most part, as neither Indian nor American... (p.177)

The first citation can be dismissed briefly: pre-Columbian Natives of North America were nowhere a gynocracy that anyone knows of, if the term means (as it should, if Currie knows her Greek) absolute rule by women. The hundreds of different Native North American groups should probably object to being lumped together into one undifferentiated mass of tribes, especially the people who lived under systems of institutionalized rule by chieftains and those who lived under a regime of consensus expressed through a Headman.

The long quote from Currie is particularly interesting, but the same criticism applies: borrowing a confessional page from Haig-Brown's article, I might mention that I live in Europe and have yet to notice a common 'European' mentality. It is also significant that Currie actually cites someone (Pratt) who warns of homogenizing the other into a collective 'they', yet proceeds to do just that in her portrayal of European colonization, conveniently ignoring the scads of scholarship over the decades that have continually and consistently contrasted the Hudson's

Bay Company's attempts to keep missionaries, settlers, and teachers away from Indians, with the American colonising project. Just as an interesting sidelight, note the different spellings of 'colonizer' (American) that Currie (a Canadian?) uses and 'coloniser' (British/Canadian, yet issuing from an American publisher!) in the work she cites (Memmi) in support of her viewpoint: homogenous hegemony indeed.

What Currie and Fee have in common with their subject matter(s) is an overt politicization of viewpoint. This is acceptable in sociological analysis and literary criticism, but the problem is that the protagonist, *Slash*, is also a political mouthpiece who seems to spend a great deal of time muttering about decentred and deconstructed positions. Fair enough; the author is a kind of god, after all, but can the literary or social critic re-write history? Or, worse, ignore the obvious implication leaping out of the page in the citation the critic herself chooses? If Harold Cardinal says there is no Canada-and these days he is hardly the only one waving that particular flag-then it is hard to imagine a national colonizing consciousness being served by any action as relatively insignificant as publishing this article in *Canadian Literature*. I suppose I am trying to say that these self-reflexive debates get carried away. There may be 600,000 Native people in Canada. How many of them read *Canadian Literature*? And how many of those take it seriously? Furthermore, if Canadians define themselves negatively in the sense of being 'not-Indian', this does not automatically mean 'anti-Indian' just as the history of our complicated Canadian love-hate relationship with the U.S. repeatedly demonstrates (and so does Stephen Leacock in *Sunshine Stories*) that 'not American' is palpably different from 'anti-American'. Judging by the 'political' citations from Native writers included in both articles, the unwanted conclusion, especially drawn from Fee's contribution, is that some Native writers write and speak and worry more about what it means to be a Native writer than actually write. Three of the articles in this collection are focussed on Armstrong's *Slash*, which might be a measure of the book's importance or the lack of something else to criticize.

Incidentally, Fee's manipulation of words in favour of her not-so-hidden agenda of locating the Canadian stereotype of the Indian in colonial power relationships can be criticized: she cites Thérien in French, who uses the expression "*le colon*", and Fee provides "the colonial" as a translation (p.178), thus implicating a nasty set of exploitative power relationships, as she no doubt meant to evoke. Unfortunately, the usual sense of *colon* is 'settler', a more neutral (though, if one is Native, a no less disturbing) word. There are other colourings: Thérien's "...l'Européen qui décide de s'installer s'installer in Quebecois French means 'settle' 'move' and 'sit down', not 'occupy territory', a far more sinister and militaristic-sounding phrase. A more faithful translation is 'the European who decided to settle in North America'. Thérien: "*En devenent 'canadien'...*"; Fee: "To become Canadian..." instead of 'Becoming' *canadien*-"to become"

speaks of a conscious engagement or programme in the sense of a prior condition that must be met to obtain a resulting condition, whereas 'becoming' (a more faithful and a literal translation all rolled into one) is an entirely different thing; there was no Canada as a political entity at the time of French colonization and so the uppercase 'C' is unwarranted, and '*canadien*' meant, again in Quebecois French (as seems to be how Thérien is using it), any inhabitant of Nouvelle France, not a citizen of Canada (note that he places it in a single quotes whereas Fee does not). Hence a good translator would not translate it as 'Canadian' without qualifying it, and a 20th century English-speaking Canadian market would understand, though perhaps not care, what '*canadien*' in quotes means. Quibbling? Perhaps, but the hunter of 'sacred' images can become prey when the words become canonical and the text encyclical, and in the context of a literary journal I find the obvious political connotations that have been inserted into Thérien's text disturbing, both as another example of special pleading and simply as a butchery of the language. Surely literary concerns are first and foremost linguistic, not political.

"The Politics of Representation: Some Native Canadian Women Writers" by Barbara Godard is an insightful though jargon-filled and overly complex examination of how representations are constructed, maintained, exploited, and resisted. This too contains some special pleading (on p.189, when a reporter's reaction to a claim for an affirmative action policy on Native writers is cited as " 'outrageous' and subversive of existing political arrangements," -note the 'and' after the 'outrageous' attributed to the reporter), but the author is so unashamedly inspired by Derrida, Lacan, Bakhtin, Foucault and all the other post-modern lit-crit heavies that she has no need to over-indulge in this kind of spurious argumentation. In fact, she is so clearly post-modern that she sometimes gets lost in the verbiage.

There is no doubt that hidden agendas of racism and oppression in all its forms permeate every aspect of the discourses, registers and codes in our society. But then again, I favour a non-monolithic view of society and culture, and I would ask, well then, do hidden agendas of equality, humanism and all the rest permeate ideologies of racism and oppression as well? The answer, obviously, is yes, otherwise there would be no means to mount a resistance or do anything other than parrot and reformulate a monolithic ideology. Where do resistance and alternate configurations come from? From imperfectly assimilated monolithic ideologies, values and hegemonies? If so, Godard and others of her persuasion do not have a very complicated or flattering view of the human mind or spirit.

On the right to represent the Other (at least in print), Godard takes a strong stand by condemning the Toronto *Globe and Mail* for its implicit racism as a prelude to analyzing the relation of power to knowledge. For example, when describing the politics of representation on the issue of race, she asks, can the bourgeois theorize revolution? The answer seems

to be yes, although of course the image of revolution arrived at by the bourgeois may not be able to take in all available forms, and risks degenerating into a kind of Trotskyist vanguard speaking for (and killing off unenlightened members of) the margins (this is my imagery here, not Godard's). Yet she takes several pages of dense jargon-filled convolutions to get there when she could have simply mentioned Marx, a son of a teacher and a friend of an industrialist, and referred to how these things have a way of getting off-track. On the other hand, seeing as how Pol Pot's Cambodian horrors seem to have been entirely homegrown, maybe she preferred to avoid dropping names from the Left Pantheon. I do not like to reproach a writer for not saying it the way I would have said it, but Godard gets so caught up in this rhetoric that she forgets an elementary point: when Native writers complain about being censored (not published), there is little need to *immediately* have recourse to complicated analyses of the hidden manipulation of tropes by capitalist-colonialist ideological hegemonies that benefit "institutionalized" ways of thinking and discussing, when 90% of publishing is simply governed by straightforward supply and demand market economics. If there's no buyer, there's nothing to sell. If, on the other hand, Native writers want to complain about non-commercial censorship, as for example in the academic world, then let them get in line with the rest of us. And if some minority writers have to go abroad to get recognition (p.187), then they are merely joining a long, mostly-White list of Canadian actors, writers, scientists, and academics.

All this is a prelude to a long and intricate examination of Maracle's *I am Woman* and Armstrong's *Slash*. Typically, the analysis starts off with a full page (p.204) devoted to the covers and lining papers of the two books. Again, I repeat that I am not denigrating Godard's project, only its tediousness. Godard has lots of ideas but some difficulty getting them across. Let the reader judge:

...one learns to recognize oneself in a series of subject-positions (boy or girl, white or red, writer or reader, etc.), which are the positions from which discourse is intelligible to itself and others. Subjectivity is thus a matrix of subject-positions which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with each other. (p.221)

So far, so good, even though subjectivity as 'a matrix of subject-positions' already has me worrying about the sequel. She seems to be saying that people have multiple roles and carry on an internal dialogue with the image of others they carry within themselves, in an effort to continually re-define their social selves. George Herbert Mead said it, and simply, more than 60 years ago. But the paragraph immediately following is a semantic and syntactical nightmare. *Caveat lector*:

For this movement across the bar of language from signifier to signified occurs, as Lacan has shown, in the Imaginary, when the subject recognizes itself in a misrecognition of the self as other, in contra-diction. By cross-identifying in this way with the Subject, the subject is constituted as subject in ideology, according to Althusser, positioned within the social discourses available to the subject. Given that the coherence of the sign and of the predicate synthesis are the guarantors of the unity of the speaking subject, as Kristeva argues, any attack against the sign-or syntax-is the mark of a re-evaluation process vis-a-vis the speaking subject's unity. Writing history from the perspective of the subject in the process of making herself a subject through the constitution of an interlocutor, a community of readers, the "you" who bring her into being as subject, is to enact such a sign crime that destabilizes the unity of the subject of the dominant discourse of history, constructing a different subject of (hi)story, a critical subject, the Native storyteller as "storian." Rather than offering a historical product, these fictions unfold an epistemological process, a way of knowing through telling and reading, and an existential process, a way of forming an identity through discourse. (p.221)

And so on. What Godard is saying here in the first 10 lines-indeed, in the whole paragraph save the last sentence-is almost anyone's guess (she is saying, I think, that any time we use non-standard forms, in speech, dress or behaviour, we call the norms into question, so that a Native historian, like a Native anthropologist, is vaguely disturbing and ultimately liberating because it calls our sometimes restrictive assumptions into question). I do not wish to sneer at a scholar wrestling with a difficult subject, as if everything must be reduced to one syllable words, but surely the ideas can be re-stated in such a way that do not require re-reading each line a myriad of times. And most of us have read Lacan, Derrida et al., so it is not a matter of content but of form. I do not see why the reader should be forced to re-construct every line.

I think Godard's article can be (almost) summed up by citing: "Both speaking marginality and speaking against it, exploiting the ambiguity of their within/without position with respect to power, these emerging subjects destabilize institutional practices" (p.193). In other words, ambiguity, exploitation and monolithic institutions have their flip side.

To be brief, though without wishing to imply that these other contributions are less important or interesting: "A Double-Bladed Knife: Subversive Laughter in Two Stories by Thomas King" by Margaret Atwood

analyzes two "perfect" (p.244) stories whose basis is humour but whose aim is to call into question White stereotypes of Indians. Both excerpts from the story and Atwood's analysis are excellent, as are King's poems (pp.250-253, 265). Humour may be the great antidote to institutionalized racism, and King its champion (other works by King: *Medicine River*, Toronto: Penguin, 1990; *One Good Story, That One* [forthcoming]). "One Generation from Extinction" by Basil Johnston (who opens and closes the volume) is an eloquent plea for giving Native languages the material means to survive and thrive in the contemporary Canadian context; his "The Prophecy" is a humorous description of Whites couched in the structures and tropes of an 'Indian myth, somewhat reminiscent of Horace Miner's "The Nacrerima". "The Baffin Writers' Project" by Victoria Freeman documents an Inuit response to cultural weakening caused by rapid and sometimes devastating contact. Lee Maracle's "Yin Chin" is a somewhat narcissistic adult reminiscence on discovering what it means to be an Indian racist, though oddly enough her portrayal of Vancouver Chinese society is more vivid, lively and polished than her ponderously-written insights into her own history and self. The two review articles, "No Writing at All Here: Review Notes on Writing Native" by L.R. Ricou, and "Sucking Kamaras" (a review of Goldie's *Fear and Temptation*) by Gary Boire are both excellent and required reading. I can hardly review a review here, though, so I will merely urge interested persons to read the articles; it will be time well-spent.

I have mentioned Haig-Brown when discussing Shirley Bear's contribution, and will only add that it is an account of her work in Native (she prefers 'First nations') education. She seems to have taken Geertz's sentiments contained in his book I cited above (although in her case it was from a published interview) to heart, that younger anthropologists seem engaged in a tell-all confession in order to identify their biases (or I suppose 'sub-textual resonances' might be more politically correct, and I suspect purging the soul in public has more to do with liberal guilt and hand-wringing than with a desire for scientific accuracy), though in a way that Geertz probably never intended: the article is almost entirely about herself, a bare-all recounting of the pitfalls of working on the (Native-White) margins. I will not comment on it, except one thought, since I do not understand the point of the article: she mentions (p.240) that First Nations are engaged in a struggle for control, presumably for their own identity and of their own fates. Laudable sentiments, perhaps, but I thought 'control' was one of those examples of European hegemony that we are supposed to avoid. Curious, especially when one considers that Haig-Brown is working with White cultural forms, so 'control' in this context can (ambiguously, and perhaps dangerously) be interpreted as meaning that Native people want to seize control of White image-making instruments, I would have thought 'struggle for autonomy', or 'dignity', more accurate. And a reference to advice given by her brother, Alan Haig-Brown, in

Harvard bibliographic reference style under "(Alan 1987)" (p.238), given that there is no bibliography, is gratuitously chummy and self-serving.

To conclude, this book not only contains some fine scholarship and writing, it is also a legitimate vehicle (even though many of the authors are White) for alternate and interesting voices that appear to have transcended the simple (though all too-tragic) themes of alienation and anger of the '60s and '70s. I hope this book, its excesses and sympathies aside, will help forge a finer understanding of a new Native expression; if (to paraphrase Tomson Highway) there was ever a time when Canadians needed to listen to other voices, other dreams, the time is now. There is much to criticize here, but the fact that it is worth criticizing is perhaps the greatest praise I can give this book.

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