**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**FIRST NATIONS LITERATURE: ARTICLES/BOOKS**


Aurylaite opens the article with a discussion of the identity of Canada as constructed largely through borders with reference to W.H. New. She states that “the focus of this essay is Canada’s internal borders, more specifically, tense racial/cultural demarcation lines, topographical, experiential, and imagined, between the country’s indigenous minorities and the white population” (81). This article largely focuses on concepts of border creation and exploration through *Keeper’ N Me* and *Ravensong* ultimately suggesting that “both novels set indigenous and white spaces into a stark and highly prejudiced contrast as well as deploy the motif of the border as an element structuring the narrative space and as a means of foregrounding and exploring the constructedness of cultural and racial differences between white and indigenous communities” (81). “In both novels, the border is constructed as a protective screen for the racialized indigenous Otherness, which refuses to yield to the normative assimilationist impulses of the white space” (82). The article’s analysis of both texts yields a discussion of the role of borders in the construction of every space, i.e., not as something only present in “White” culture. “What I want to foreground here is the protagonist’s need to subject his performance to the rules of a particular space as his visible Otherness is exposed and renders him vulnerable to the gaze of the dominant group on either side of the border. This is the transformative power of the space, its “socializing role” in Lefebvre’s terms, when “space ‘decides’ what activity may occur” and “commands bodies” (Lefebvre 1991, 143)” (84). It highlights tensions between idealizing indigenous space/culture (*Keeper’ N Me*) and more problematic views of the mobilization between hegemonic and indigenous space/culture in general (*Ravensong*). Aurylaite concludes: “Both *Keeper’n Me* and *Ravensong* deploy the motif of the border to problematize the racial/cultural clash. Both novels foreground the contrastive performative impulses which emanate from white and indigenous spaces, experienced as incompatible and distrustful of one another” (94). Throughout the article, Aurylaite the importance of Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and how it functions in both novels with regard to space and boundaries/borders.

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1 Although this is largely speculative, I would attribute this difference to *Ravensong*’s postmodern qualities. I haven’t read *Keeper’ N Me*, but I would speculate that it does not contain the postmodern elements of *Ravensong*. 

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*An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English, Fourth Edition*  
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Blyth’s book is a PhD dissertation that explores the nature of the “trickster” character in contemporary First Nations literature from authors including Eden Robinson, Louise Halfe, and Thomas King. Her analyses are largely performed through theories put forth by Gerald Vizenor, a well-established Native American theorist who works largely in postmodernism, as she attempts to argue why the texts she analyzes “act as powerful tools of decolonization and recognize the importance of Vizenor’s position that ‘tricky stories are the cure’” (ii). While the prose of the book is sometimes self-derailing, Blyth’s work here is productive in the sense that it puts Vizenor’s theories of trickster discourse (or “coyote pedagogy”) into practice through its analysis as well as through its own textual qualities. Ultimately, what Blyth highlights through readings of the above-mentioned authors are the ways in which they utilize the concept of the trickster in their works to resist stringent univocality and decenter such concepts. Such a project is irrefutably informed by postmodernism and Blyth’s use of Vizenor points to this as he is a theorist who reconciles First Nations literature with postmodernism in a productive manner to highlight the ways in which authors such as King utilize “humour as a powerful weapon of decolonization” (219); while I am not necessarily convinced that “decolonization” is possible per se, even theoretically, Blyth’s discussion is still useful in that it highlights the strategies utilized by First Nations authors that simultaneously function as homages to tradition while constructing “new” discourses.


Chester’s article begins by identifying that two texts from Thomas King “pay homage to the distinctive voice of the Okanagan storyteller, Harry Robinson” (44). In this sense, King works from a tradition established by a First Nations author who initiated—to some degree—the incorporation of the “oral tradition” into written literature. Chester’s article, then, is not entirely built from King’s Green Grass, Running Water, but rather, through a dialogic interaction between King and Robinson. She identifies that “King’s storytelling is saturated in dialogue; the storied dialogues shared between writer and readers resemble and resonate with the kinds of dialogues that storyteller and audience share in oral storytelling performances” (45). What Chester accomplishes here is an identification of the ways in which King (and other First Nations authors) utilize textual strategies (in King’s case, largely postmodern ones) to create an aesthetic of “dialogue”—to suggest it attempts to be mimetic of dialogue is reductive, I would argue. However, and this is Chester’s main argument, King and Robinson’s “theory, therefore, is interactive and dialogic, rather than monologic” (45). Chester’s account is highly academic, citing structuralist scholars such as Northrop Frye (who she suggests King and Robinson work against in some ways) and Mikhail Bakhtin. What is significant about Green Grass, Running Water is the way in
which it “requires participants, readers, to interact with it” (49). Pointing towards a discussion between two characters in the novel (Coyote and the unnamed narrator), Chester suggests that “In this case part of their argument seems to be that one should read stories as theory and as aspects of social process, rather than as literary play alone” (emphasis added, 58). Chester, through King, ultimately argues for the “living” qualities of literature—a view that is reconcilable with postmodernism and other multi-vocal theoretical movements.


Davis’ article explores the sometimes tumultuous relationship between writers who write about a certain community and the community that is portrayed in that writer’s work. She frames her paper with the following questions: “Who can tell stories, and, more particularly, who can tell stories that embody Indigenous knowledge and experiences? Which contexts make telling Indigenous stories risky? And, when research practices and relationships are being contested by Indigenous peoples, how do we recognize ethical research” (2). While not immediately exploring First Nations literature, its emphasis on the importance stories in First Nations cultures as well as human existence and the ethical problems involved in relaying traditional knowledge in particular spaces has significant resonance in every form First Nations discourse. Davis states, “stories cement together generations of collective memory, embodying the historical, spiritual, social, and spatial” (3). As Davis identifies, there is a significant challenge in who claims “domain” over indigenous knowledge (including stories). Davis notes that “issues of control are also intertwined in current debates related to self-representation, voice, and appropriation” (4–5) and “with ‘research’ and ‘representation’ so deeply implicated in replicating relationships of dominance rooted in our shared colonial past, contemporary researchers striving to engage in an ethical relationship with Indigenous communities are challenged to decolonize their thinking and research practices” (5). Davis provides an illustrative table that categorizes tensions between the publication(s) of First Nations knowledge, which examines spectrums of the “Public” and “Non-Public” sphere in relation to “Outsider” and “Insider” and what the implications are for broader indigenous culture(s). Moreover, Davis highlights the problems involved in institutions such as universities disseminating indigenous knowledge: “In such a space, Indigenous stories enter a risky realm in terms of the multiple ways in which they may be used with malice, intentionally or not. Risky stories represents a crystallization of particular tensions related to recording and disseminating Indigenous stories where rules regarding who can tell them and for what use slip beyond storytellers’ control” (10). Davis concludes: “It is this spirit of ethics that needs to break free to create ethical research relationships that escape colonization’s bonds” (17). This article highlights some important issues regarding representation and the insider/outside dynamics involved in disseminating indigenous knowledge.

Dobson’s thesis in “Indigeneity and Diversity” is explicitly stated: “it contends that the study of literature written in Canada by writers of colour and Indigenous authors is still in need of investigations that are concerned with the cultural industries’ and readers’ demands or expectations of writers. Colonial audiences continue to exert an immense pressure on work by these authors” (55). Thus, the main explorations and points in the article are relative to First Nation’s literary role in “Can Lit.” Discussing Mathur, who suggests that writers of “colour” have come to represent Canadian Literature (a cultural industry that such writers once opposed), Dobson suggests that “[Robinson’s work] considers Indigenous writing’s particular relationship to colonial Canada and the broad category of the writer of colour [and that] she struggles with how her writing will be recognized both in her community and mainstream Canadian letters, readers bear witness to a shifting politics in writing in Canada” (55–56). Dobson highlights the tensions involved in creative production for a (popular) First Nations author in terms of the communities they are writing “into.” Focusing on Monkey Beach, Dobson states that “this novel displays anxiety about how it will be recognized as either a representative ‘Native’ text or as a more universal/Western novel aimed at a mainstream audience” (56) and ultimately that the text should not be read as strictly a “native” one, which is a consistent argument threaded throughout many of the contemporary writing about (largely postmodern) First Nations work. Dobson suggests that Robinson works out of certain “ambivalences” toward fixed labels, but such a label seems to undervalue the active qualities what Robinson’s work does. However, Dobson does later elaborate, stating that “Robinson is neither right nor wrong for adopting the strategy of simultaneously evoking and avoiding what might be deemed more ‘authentic’ Native literary structures” (64). Dobson concludes: The term “Native” can neither be left out or assumed, and this essay is left reckoning with the ways in which Monkey Beach is being absorbed into the everyday processes that celebrate Canada’s diversity and differences without recognizing the specificities of cultural heritage (66).


Eigenbrod’s Travelling Knowledges is an academic book that seeks to move “beyond” the stratifying aspects of the written text, which attempts to highlight the migratory qualities of First Nations literature while analyzes such constructions as border and border-crossing. Eigenbrod seeks to move away from a discourse about First Nations literature that functions to “become another ‘conquest’, in [Tzvetan] Todorov’s meaning of the term” (xv). While there seems to be a lot of focus on Eigenbrod’s personal, subjective experiences in teaching First Nations literature, she does provide some substantial commentary on the literatures themselves. She does focus on questions of “cultural literacy,” which is a common thread it seems in discussions of
First Nations literature and its pedagogical teaching. Significant sections include “Reading for Boundary De/Constructions” and “Travelling Knowledges.” In her conclusion, she explains why she chooses the metaphor of the nomad to illustrate reading practices: “I chose the metaphor of the migrant (and the nomad) to describe my attempts at (cross-cultural) border crossings and at a counter-discourse ‘interrupting, disrupting linearity, fixity, sedentariness,’ in the words of Carole Boyce Davies” (202). She ultimately argues that “[First Nations’] writings help to build bridges, that they teach about their ways and views of life, implicitly and explicitly” and that for this reason, First Nations literature should be studied.


Fee and Flick’s article focuses on the critical function of humour and language games in King’s Green Grass, Running Water (Canadian Literature has this entire issue dedicated to articles on King). Fee and Flick state that “there is no reader of this novel. . . who is not outside some of its networks of cultural knowledge. But every reader is also inside at least one network and can therefore work by analogy to cross borders into the other” (131). This strategy functions “to entice, even trick this audience into finding out for themselves [what is being alluded to in a given situation in the novel]” (132). Indeed, they state that “Green Grass, Running Water is full of jokes that require detailed cultural/historical knowledge for full appreciation” (133), but it is important to note that such a detailed knowledge is not necessary to approach the text or get some of its internal jokes. Ultimately, the article details some of the instances in the text where these jokes arise while relating it back to larger textual concepts mentioned above. They conclude that “there’s a lot of material to pack in and the only way to do it is through promoting lateral (or bilateral or trilateral) cross-border thinking in the reader” (139).


Gruber’s book studies the significant role and use of humour in Native North American Literature with relation to First Nations identity. Gruber identifies that “native humour” can be considered somewhat of an oxymoron when placed beside popular European representations of First Nations as stoic (7); however, as Gruber makes clear, humour holds a significant position in First Nations culture as well as their literary tradition. Gruber states that “even though Native cultures underwent massive changes as a consequence of colonization, humor and laughter continue to hold a special place in traditional ceremonies and in everyday life” (9). She argues that “contemporary Native writers rely on this mediating and didactic capacity of humor, on its transcendence of the purely rational, to renegotiate images of Nativeness that are located in the readers’ imaginations” (10). Highlighting the fact that Native literature stems largely from an
oral tradition, Gruber notes the significant difference between humours in writing and humour in oral storytelling: drama (12). Ultimately, Gruber’s book argues that “humor in contemporary Native writing constitutes a strategic textual device: It promotes intercultural understanding—if often through humorous criticism—and participates in the positioning of the Native subject and Native communities in an intra- and intercultural context” (224). Gruber’s analysis provides a systematic analysis into the socio-politically liberating potential of humour in First Nations literatures.


In the article, Harry calls for greater attention to First Nations and Inuit writers. At the time of publication, Harry felt that publishers had ignored a body of work by First Nations and Inuit writers that belonged alongside Western English literature. One point that resonates within contemporary postcolonial thought is the myth that First Nations and Inuit writing is primarily focussed on retelling traditional oral stories. Also, Harry suggests that although a large amount of the writing coming from First Nation writers is biography an autobiography, there is a as vast a range in First Nations writing as there is by any other culture. She also suggests that First Nations and Inuit writers should not conform to the expectations of Western English publishers.


In this essay, Horne discusses how writers can realize what “Homi Bhabha terms the ‘rules of recognition’”, a subversive power that facilitates “the construction of the native as other—from within the discourse of the dominant culture” (255). Horne argues against Bhabha in that she states First Nations authors in Canada “can subvert and reform/reform the rules of recognition of dominant discourse to create a new discourse” (256). For example, Horne argues that Thomas King’s Green Grass, Running Water subverts the discourse and settler cultural modes of production that he employs, and that King “knows the difference between creative hybridity and colonial mimicry” (272).

Hulan and Warley’s article examines the ways in which First Nations are paradoxically included and simultaneously excluded in Canadian history as well as the ways in which “certain images” of First Nations cultures have become “highly visible” in the past few decades. They state that “paradoxically, First Peoples are an (in)visible presence in the Canadian mainstream, including the official history most of us learned in school—there but seldom represented except in relation to the dominant culture—a position in which ‘the Native’ signifies the abject, pushed to the fringes of consciousness and the edge of town”. Highlighting the general ignorance surrounding issues of race in certain aspects of Canadian culture, Hulan and Warley point out that “a study of 200 Toronto-area schools conducted between 1993 and 1994 by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association showed that students were ignorant of the history of racism in Canada” To combat such ignorance, Hulan and Warley “suggest challenging the status quo by using the views of culture and knowledge offered by aboriginal thinkers to redefine ‘cultural literacy’.” Like other articles examined here, they also point towards universities as being a sometimes unwelcoming space/institution for First Nations peoples and cultures. They state that “Aboriginal and non-aboriginal academics bear collective responsibility for ensuring that the significant contribution First Nations literature makes to world literature is understood and respected, yet members of both constituencies face significant challenges”. Ultimately, they argue that “that there is a direct relationship between classroom study of First Nations literature and the transformation of mainstream culture. Through achieving greater literacy with respect to First Peoples in Canada, students and educators alike have the potential to become more informed and responsible citizens.”


Lutz’s article begins by discussing the state of many First Nations in the sixties—the state of poverty. He highlights this by using an epigraph quotation from Howard Adams, the first metis to hold a doctorate; Adams responds to an interview question by stating that there was no “literature” in his community because “you cannot talk about culture or literature when you are hungry” (167). Lutz highlights the struggle that First Nations people were involved in in the Sixties—a struggle to reclaim identities and while there were notes of progress, “the period is marked by contrasts and internal conflicts” (168). Lutz cites the Civil Rights movement as informing relations between First Nations and non-First Nations in Canada during the Sixties; however, he also notes that “in the sixties, after half a century of paternalist domination and ethnocidal education, Native people in Canada had become literary mutes” (175). Significantly, Lutz points out that “poetry was and still is the most predominant genre used by Native au-
thors and another People of Colour in North America” (180); Lutz speculates that, for First Nations, this may be due to its structural affinities with orality. Despite its age, this article provides a good footing for the history of First Nations literature and the larger historical cruxes that shape contemporary First Nations literature.


“The Trickster’s Laugh” is simultaneously a journal article, a short story/narrative, and an interview with prominent First Nations writers. The article seeks to explore Moses’, Highway’s, and Keeshig-Tobia’s relationship to and experiences with literature. Moses begins with a discussion of a group he was working with in 1986—“I have begun working with a board full of First Nation and other artists and community members who have answered a cry for help from Tomson Highway, the new artistic director of Native Earth Performing Arts, the Native actors’ theatre” (107). He notes that while he and the other two authors in the article may resemble each other in some way or another on the outside, “from the inside there are differences in cultural values, assumptions, and behaviors that persist now as they did in ‘time immemorial’” (107). From this, Moses discusses the ways in which First Nations “identity” has come to be constructed and perpetuated. He frames the article with a question: So the question then is what can a meeting of a Cree musician and playwright (Tomson), an Ojibwa storyteller (Lenore), and a Delaware poet with Iroquoian roots (me) agree to agree on?” (108) Ultimately, the three writers decide to create a “political-sounding literary/cultural organization we call the Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster” (109). What this Committee seeks to is challenge rigidity and fixidness in culture and politics: “It is in us to hope that if this Trickster character was strange enough to a scientist to be marked and remarked upon, then it might also be true enough to get us all beyond the scientific attention span” (109). Moses highlights some of consistently threaded ideas throughout First Nations literature that have significant implications for the future and past of not just First Nations literature, but literature on the whole.


Neuhaus’ book is an exploration in “holophrastic reading” which she argues “constitutes a significant reading strategy for textualized orality in Indigenous literatures composed in English” (1). “For literary purposes” writes Neuhaus, “I define the holophrase as a productive and ordered concatenation of signs in polysynthetic languages that forms the core of a substantive polysynthetic idea unit and functions as a significant narrative unit in a given polysynthetic discourse” (3). Moreover, Neuhaus points out that “Holophrastic reading constitutes a culturally specific reading strategy for textualized orality in Indigenous literature in English” (6). She notes that the holophrase has been largely
ignored in the study of Indigenous literature, which is problematic when considering the traditional role of orality in First Nations storytelling; indeed, Neuhaus argues that holophrases are “a key element for developing a culturally specific reading strategy for textualized orality in Indigenous literatures” (13). While Neuhaus’ book is linguistically dense and technical (i.e., it uses terminology and concepts specific to the discipline of linguistics), it highlights some important issues regarding language, literature, and First Nations literary texts, namely the implications of the marriage, for lack of a better term, between Indigenous language and English, particularly with translated traditional, oral texts that have been textualized. Ultimately, what Neuhaus’ arguments amount to is the suggestion that, in the texts she discusses, there is “a widespread use of paraholophrases as discourse devices that help re-create generic conventions of Indigenous oratures” (216); in other words, she suggests that the use of paraholophrases functions as a way of reconciling textuality and orality with regard to contemporary First Nations literatures written in English.


Newhouse’s article begins with a discussion of the problems involved in discussing “indigenous knowledge,” particularly in an academic setting, by suggesting that “we who work in universities and governments, and live in society in general, must recognize the privileged place that we have given to methods of knowing derived from the European enlightenment” (139). He speaks of the necessity of preserving and advancing indigenous knowledge “in its political and social context” (139). While Newhouse does not focus on literature, his article does provide some useful perspectives regarding the socio-political realities faced by marginalized indigenous groups from the standpoint of academia. Newhouse points out that the contemporary First Nations society as “a society that is aware of the implications of its colonization and is choosing deliberately, consciously, and systematically to deal with that colonization” (141)—what Newhouse calls “post-colonial consciousness.” Newhouse seeks a “complex understanding” in Indigenous scholarship where “complex understanding occurs when we begin to see a phenomenon from various perspectives, as well as the relationships among these perspectives. Complex understanding does not seek to replace one view with another but to find a means of ensuring that all [possible] views are given due consideration” (143). Newhouse ultimately concludes that “living and working in a multicultural world requires that we grapple with each other’s cognitive universes and learn how to see through the minds of others” (154).

McKegney’s book explores the ways in which writing and literature have aided in reconstructing communities (and identities) in a post-Residential School world. In framing his approach to the relatively controversial topic, McKegney states that “we must be wary of all unqualified generalizations, as we must be wary of polarizing binary thinking. Heroes aren’t always heroic, abusers don’t just abuse, and victims are never victims only” (5). Such a framing serves his book well as it makes explicit his consciousness of the problematics often perpetuated in discourse about Residential schools. McKegney makes his aims clear:

This book takes as its focus the understudied resource of literary engagements with residential school history, composed by residential school survivors, in order to gauge their impact on the future of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in the geographical pace of Canada [. . .] to examine how the residential school system has influenced Native literature [. . .] and [. . .] to examine how looking at Native literature alters our understandings of residential school history and the residential school legacy (7).

The book examines the issues that arise in assimilationist culture and significantly “reads” Residential schools as it exams the survival narrative. McKegney paves the way to make some sophisticated textual arguments when he asks an important question: “What does literature do that history doesn’t?” (32). This book is a valuable resource for approaching the ways in which “trauma” resonates throughout First Nations literature, but, significantly, *does not dominate it*. Continuing some threads already discussed in this bibliography, McKegney takes on the trickster in “From Trickster Poetics to Transgressive Politics” as he highlights the socio-political potentials of traditional First Nations figures. In its conclusion, McKegney states that “while conceding the need to interrogate standard historical accounts and to carefully analyze the implications of what I have called legacy discourse to discuss residential school survival literature intelligently, this book has been more concerned with the creative presentation of residential school history through art than with the solidification of ‘facts’” (177). Such an approach highlights the transformative potential as well as the importance of literature in a socio-cultural context; while not simply arguing that literature can do “more” than those facts-based accounts, McKegney proves literature’s invaluable importance.


Rasporich’s article examines the role of Native women’s writing as a sphere in which the possibilities to challenge values and conventions of settler culture while also honouring female lineage in First Nations culture. Rasporich highlights the fact (qua Thomas King), there are
“no definitions for the body of contemporary literature being authored by writers of Native ancestry”. She argues that “Native women authors are currently shaping a literature that should find a legitimate space in an evolving decentred field of Canadian literature. At the same time, authors like Maracle are claiming First Nations kinship as the creative writing tie that binds and, thus, ethnic difference as the necessary yardstick in any assessment of their work.” Most of the article is comprised of close-readings of several female First Nations authors’ novels. Rasporich highlights that “it is clear that Native women writing are successfully putting the Mother back into the language. Neither would it seem that the current renaissance of Native women writing in English, voicing themselves, their female community and the larger First Nations society is antithetical to indigenous life as it was before colonization.” Destabilizing any temptation for the homogenization of Female First Nations authors, Rasporich states that “Finally, while common patterns can be traced in the writings of Native women, it is also most important to consider the differences and individuality of the works of each woman, each artist. The categorization of ‘Native women writers’ is itself suspect”


Smith’s article examines the role of the trickster figure (represented as Coyote) in Thomas King’s Green Grass, Running Water while relating the importance of the trickster in broader First Nations culture. Smith highlights Coyote’s role in the novel to destabilize the narrative on multiple levels by, for example, asking characters to re-tell stories or by interrupting those stories with non-sequiturs. Smith states, “King’s Coyote can be viewed as intervening in the semiotic realm—a realm where cultural signifiers and politicized discursive structures produce meaning and coherent stories. Coyote thus exemplifies a ‘semiotic trickster’, a version of what Gerald Vizenor has termed a ‘comic holotrope’” (516). Moreover, Smith highlights the role the trickster as a symbol for the construction of the narratives of the “West”: “Until recently, the image of Native American tricksters as embodied beings has been a persistent fantasy within the social imaginary of the West” (517). It is important to note that Green Grass, Running Water is one of the most frequently looked at text in the articles that were looked at for this bibliography. Discussing Michel de Certeau, Smith emphasizes the possibilities of Native voices to significantly challenge the exclusivity of the West’s written history, stating:

[By] contrasting orality with the sovereignty of written inscriptions of history and ethnology, he suggests that the writing of history occurs only when the “voice” of the other is repressed, for it cannot possibly be contained. Rather, the speech of the other must be exiled from historical and ethnological reportage, made “exotic,” for it is precisely that which holds the potential to destabilize the “continuity of signs” desired by such accounts. (527)
Smith ultimately exposes the ways in which traditional figures can be re-represented in a manner that challenges and destabilizes the histories that contributed to and perpetuated colonial practices and mentalities. For King, the trickster is both a “sacred function” as well as “a disruptive semiotic element that resists colonial representations and stories of containment” (531).


Sugars begins the article by discussing Arif Dirlik’s concept of “denial of authenticity” explored in _The Postcolonial Aura_ wherein he Dirlik argues that, according to “there are constructive ways of being essentialist” (78); she uses this discussion as a launching point to begin an analysis of Eden Robinson’s work—in particular, the short story “Dogs in Winter.” Sugars argues that Dirlik’s concept is “self-Orientalizing” and that Robinson’s work “invokes the often negative imagery conventionally associated with Native peoples (hunting, cannibalism, savagery, primitivism, the windigo/sasquatch) and uses it to strategic effect [. . .] she frustrates the reader’s desire to interpret her characters on the basis of their ethno-cultural identity” (78). Ultimately, Sugars suggests that Robinson provides alternative (and multiple) constructions of Native/First Nations identity: “Robinson is at once appropriating and reformulating the discourse of savagery [. . .] she negates racialized binaries through her own problematization of racial identity in her stories” (79). Reminiscent of Bhabha’s “hybridity,” Sugars labels Robinson’s de/re/construction of First Nations identity as “post-Indian.” Theorists Sugars references include Freud and Judith Butler, but she does not interact with their ideas at length. Sugars concludes, “‘Dogs in Winter’ (like the other stories in Traplines) does not offer a conventional postcolonial vision of Native–white relations; instead, this story presents a problematic post-Indian consciousness” (87). This article highlights some significant aspects of the treatment of First Nations identity in contemporary culture and the problems involved in calling for a (re)construction of contemporary First Nations identity with rigid, Noble Savage-esque and how Robinson’s literature highlights this.


Van Styvendale’s _Im/possibility_ is a highly theoretical (largely post-structuralist) account of the tensions involved in conceptualizing a “return to” or “recovery of” pre-colonized indigenous identity explored in what they deem “Native North American Literature.” This is an important digression/sidenote: It seems that, while the project for Cambridge focuses on First Nations lit, the labels of indigenous literature seem fluid and unfixed and often reflect regional rather than national discourses. The book is a PhD dissertation and analyzes works from Jeannette Arm-
strong, Sherman Alexie, Tomson Highway, and Joseph Boyden in four sections which explore “historical production of recovery as literary tradition,” trauma theory and First Nations lit, questions of agency, and finally, the actual process of “recovery” and its mechanics. What is significant in this work is its ability to utilize dense theory to tackle concerns that seem to be common threads throughout discourse on First Nations literature, largely the role of identity and its relevance in what can be labelled as the contemporary First Nations “condition.” The work focuses on theories of subjection/subjectification to approach First Nations lit. It demonstrates the productive use of non-Native theory to approach First Nations literature while not undermining its concerns with recovery and (re)construction of First Nations identity in a cosmopolitan world. “Recognizing the pitfalls of “applying” theory to literature, an approach which is especially problematic if the theory is non-Native and the literature indigenous, as the former is often privileged over the latter, the conversation model positions literature and theory to communicate reciprocally” Van Styvendale continues, “my study can be seen as a starting place for a comparative analysis of indigenous theories of language as “bringing into being” and Euroamerican theories of performativity” (248).


Vautier’s article largely focuses on the destabilizing of myth and national identity in historiographic metafictions from Barcelo, Bowering, and Poulin with a particular focus on the manners in which they confront “concerns of postcolonial practice” and other themes such as “place and displacement” and “multiple challenges to Eurocentric worldviews” (15–16). The more significant qualities of this article in relation to First Nations literature arise when Vautier states:

Challenges to traditional, eurocentric notions of myth issue an invitation to the reader to consider the flexible and indeterminate nature of post-European myth and the related ongoing question of national identities. These texts explore transcultural identities in part through their use of the Amerindian figure as an element of postcolonial discourse. Although that use is exploratory and sometimes problematic, the figure of the Amerindian and the Métis can facilitate a textual discussion of pluralism in political identity (29).

Compared to other articles and books, Vautier’s article is significantly older; in this sense it can be viewed as a pioneering text that initiates the discussions which provide the foundations for common discursive threads throughout First Nations literary practices and scholarly discussions on First Nations literature.

Although note exclusively focused on fiction, poetry, or “literature” as such, Voyageur’s article discusses the prevalence of contemporary First Nations print media; Voyageur cites the Library and Archives Canada, which lists 100 Aboriginal newspapers where 20 per cent of those papers have begun after 1990 (100). The paper pays particular attention to Windspeaker and Aboriginal Times, which are two Alberta-based First Nations newspapers. What is significant about this article is its articulation of the fact that “Aboriginal media is now firmly ensconced in the Canadian cultural landscape. Aboriginal people were not always in control of their stories or images as they are today” (101). Voyageur cites previous social/Governmental institutions as economically influencing factors in First Nations individuals or groups obtaining the necessary capital to start cultural print-based ventures such as newspapers: “Not long ago, Aboriginal individuals had problems obtaining bank loans because of the Indian Act. Now, however, banks are competing for Aboriginal customers” (115). Discussing the multi-vocal nature of First Nations culture and expression Voyageur states “the beauty of having access to the press means that a variety of views can be heard. Aboriginal people do not have to speak with one monolithic voice. The Aboriginal community is too complex for that approach” (121). As mentioned above, although the article does not focus on literature, it highlights some important issues regarding First Nations media and representation in general and the socio-political dynamics of First Nations placement in broader mass media, which indeed has ramifications for First Nations literature as well.