

TRAVELLING KNOWLEDGES
Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of
Aboriginal Literatures in Canada

by
RENATE EIGENBROD

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MOVING BETWEEN CULTURES, LANGUAGES, AND LITERACIES

The truth is that most of us are movin' between Indyun. Movin' between our jobs and the sweat lodge. Movin' between school and pow wow. Movin' between English and Anishnabe. Movin' between both worlds. Movin' between 1990 and 1490. Most of us are the kinda Indyun.

—Richard Wagamese¹

Richard Wagamese's quotation from *Keeper 'N Me* emphasizes movement *between* rather than *destination* or arrival at a *fixed* place. Called "nomadism" by Braidotti and "migrancy" by Chambers, the state of being in transit is understood by the character Keeper in the political context of colonization. These movements are forced upon, not chosen, as Emma LaRocque explains in her autobiographical essay "Tides, Towns and Trains," and therefore are radically different from my own immigration and the many forms of theoretical migrations of the postmodern intellectual. For this study, Keeper's emphasis on movement is noteworthy because the elder's explanation of what it means to be "Indyun" points toward a complexity that defies categorization and definitions and, hence, is the other voice that needs to be read together with Keeper's "beaver or bear" dualism. As a migrant reader, I am thus encouraged to read for hybridic strategies in Wagamese's and, by extension, other Aboriginal texts. Homi Bhabha explains his understanding of hybridity in the following way: "What is at

issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, 'opening out,' remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference—be it class, gender or race."² Whereas an assimilationist point of view has given up agency, to borrow a term from postcolonial theory, a construction of culture and race that understands the *performative nature* of differential identities demands an active presence, a continuous involvement in the remaking of boundaries.

Although cross-cultural and cross-racial intellectual movements may be theorized in the above manner, I want to draw attention to the pitfall of hiding "behind a vocabulary which, on the one hand, overlooks one's privileged position and, on the other, makes everyone look equally privileged."³ One of the poets oscillating among various styles, genres, literacies, and languages is Louise Halfe; through her innovative use of italics in *Blue Marrow*, for example, she writes in "different" English, sometimes, for example in "My Leaders," also inserting Cree words. She explained in a lecture that she uses such variations deliberately in order "to overcome the shame instilled in her while at the Blue Quills Residential School."⁴ Ironically, this is the school where, after it had been transformed into a First Nations-controlled Education Centre, my journey of learning about Native literature started. In my opinion, this coincidence of her being silenced at a place where I, some years later, started to build a career based on the stories told by her and other Aboriginal people expresses a symptomatic dissonance that should unsettle us as non-Aboriginal scholars and remind us of our place of privilege. Unlike Louise Halfe, I never had to unlearn my native tongue and my way of thinking and being; all through my academic research following my first *contact* with Aboriginal thinking, I adapted what I learned to what I already knew; I did not have to deny any part of myself. Although I let myself be challenged and questioned rethinking the values of my cultural and literary background, my attempts at a transformed outlook⁵ were always voluntary, whereas Indigenous peoples were forced to change. As Cree scholar Craig Womack points out, qualifications for academic positions in Native literature do not include connections with Native communities,⁶ so that a non-Aboriginal scholar may become a specialist in this area by theorizing about it in an idiom familiar to him or her but without being linked to the people from whom it evolved. It is in this context of the ethically uprooted academic that scholar

Hartmut Lutz understands Maria Campbell's statement about the English language in Canada having "lost the mother":

Unless such a comment is brushed aside as "non-academic" in a gesture of colonial arrogance and/or academic provincialism, it posits a serious challenge to contemporary academia. It would require an amount of cross-cultural learning on the side of the non-Natives, which could seriously question . . . the progress of literary-theory-development in mainstream academia, where . . . literary scholarship and literary scholars have removed themselves further and further from the literary texts and the voice, the intentions, social conditions and the history of its authors—particularly, of authors of Color.⁷

The situation of non-Native writers/scholars who are able to choose their discourse contrasts with the dilemma of Native writers, as Maria Campbell explains in her interview with Lutz. She gives an insight into the difficulties Aboriginal writers face in finding the appropriate language and diction for their work. Since, in a still colonial society with English and French as the two official languages, they cannot publish in an Indigenous language, the onus is on the writers to find a linguistic medium that carries the cultural perspective of their voices and yet is understood by all (so that it can be marketed). This "exquisite balancing act," as Native American novelist Louis Owens describes such efforts, results in "a matrix of incredible heteroglossia and linguistic torsions and an intensely political situation."⁸ For Maria Campbell, "village English," rather than the standardized written English, reflects the cultural perspectives of the voices of her storytellers: "I've been working with dialect for about 10 years, and a lot of my writing now is in very broken English. . . . I can . . . express my community better than I can in 'good' English. It's more like oral tradition, and I am able to work as a storyteller with that."⁹ Similarly, Louise Halfe gives voice to one of her foremothers in the medium of the "below standard," non-literary language of the patois. Looking into a room where her European husband, now with a European wife, is reading, the Native woman concludes

. . . *My english no good.*
Me stink of rawhide an burning drum.
Smoke my hair, greased in bear fat.
*I no no udder way*¹⁰

The “no good” of the language, seemingly just a deficiency, is highlighted as *difference* to be acknowledged in the description of the speaker’s outer appearance, and in the typeface of italics.

Likewise, Jeannette Armstrong uses so-called “Rez English” in her prose text “This Is a Story” as a variant of standard English, which enables her “to construct a . . . sense of movement and rhythm through sound patterns” similar to the Okanagan language.” She believes that “Rez English from any part of the country, if examined, will display the sound and syntax patterns of the indigenous language of that area and subsequently the sounds that the landscape speaks.”¹¹ By selecting “their own English,” these writers make English “their own,” or, in Emma LaRocque’s explanation, in “due time, I have ‘appropriated’ this language [English] without abandoning my Cree. I have sought to master this language so that it would no longer master me.”¹²

Even if the Indigenous language is no longer known, an Indigenous author’s awareness of the presence of an Indigenous language will influence the choice of language as a strategy. Although Indigenous authors express their voices in a context that is by necessity “syncretic and hybridized,” coming out of experiences that refute “the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any monocentric view of human experience,”¹³ I concur with Margery Fee that “[Bill] Ashcroft has made too much of this ‘perpetual confrontation.’ Indigenous English derives its nature also from the discourse conventions of the indigenous language, lost or not.”¹⁴ Also, I agree with Thomas King’s argument in his article “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial” that there is much more to First Nations literatures than that they emerge “out of the experience of colonization” (Ashcroft’s phrase¹⁵): “the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization. . . .”¹⁶ Although Indigenous literatures oppose, refute, and contest dominant (literary) discourses, they are not merely *abrogating* “the privileged position” of English, but are *asserting* cultural distinctiveness without continuously looking at “the centre”: they centre themselves within their own cultures, communities, traditions, and languages, and as the oldest voices of the Americas. As Womack states: “We *are* the canon.”¹⁷ If one acknowledges with Fee that

“the influence of standard English on indigenous writers may be far from central and we, as literary critics, cannot rely on our knowledge of our own discourse conventions to see us through an interpretation of their work,”¹⁸ speakers of the respective Indigenous language need to be involved in the literary analysis of texts that, to those who do not speak the language, all look “the same.” The absence of such teamwork in my study here explains its limitations and, therefore, a positionality of non-authority.

Campbell and Armstrong both emphasize language that expresses culturally distinct voices (and so does Halfe in the above excerpt from her narrative in which the speaker links her “no good” English with her “no good” culturally informed outer appearance) and thus aim at finding the right linguistic medium in a society that still does not include Indigenous languages as being equally worthy as the languages of the two “founding nations.” Armstrong explains that the differences between Okanagan and English “have great influence on my worldview, my philosophy, my creative process, and subsequently my writing”; further, each of these two languages (and by extension not only Okanagan, but all Indigenous languages) shapes the “perception of the way reality occurs.”¹⁹ Similarly, Anishnabe author Ruby Slipperjack expresses a close link between language and culture and how she tries to solve the dilemma of having to write in English:

[T]here were times I was just totally frustrated. I cannot get the right meaning of what I am trying to say, so what I do most times is, I parallel it. I use English words, I devise situations where the English language would fit, still keeping the Native content intact, hopefully, so that you would get the flavour of what I am trying to say in the Native language by using this English system in there. So the feeling comes across.²⁰

Each Aboriginal author’s attitude toward the significance of language contradicts Ashcroft’s, Griffiths’s, and Tiffin’s assertions about the “fallacy of both the representationist and culturally determinist views of language.”²¹ Their arguments about “essentialist assumptions” about language reveal again that Indigenous literatures are indeed not part of the postcolonial world they construct in their theories. Not only should an outsider refrain from undermining the repeatedly made claim by Indigenous writers that they lose important nuances and layers of meaning when writing in a non-Indigenous language, but outsiders must recognize that

the emphasis on *essential* differences between Indigenous languages and English is also an important point in the political struggle for decolonization. Aboriginal students in my university classes increasingly question “the Native content,” as Slipperjack says, of literatures written in English and hope that the title of the anthology I use—*Native Literature Written in English*—foreshadows an anthology of literatures written in Indigenous languages. Albert Memmi, in his classic study *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), maintains that “the most urgent claim of a group to revive is certainly the liberation and restoration of its language.”²²

On the other hand, while Indigenous languages are of great importance in self-identification of colonized peoples, they are not considered the only cultural marker. Again, it is important to pay attention to diversity of experiences and background, and individual preferences, among Aboriginal people. While Basil Johnston explains categorically that “only language and literature can restore the ‘Indian-ness,’”²³ Lee Maracle maintains: “Language is one means of expression of culture, but it is not the main expression. . . .”²⁴ In this (transitional) stage of Aboriginal literatures, writers who do consider their respective Indigenous language a significant aspect of their creative process often “move between” finding ways of making their first language known, and “translating” and appropriating English for their own uses. Anishnabe writer Basil Johnston, for example, includes Anishnabe (Ojibway) words and sentences in his autobiography *Indian Schooldays* (1988). Arun Mukherjee interprets this strategy as “a declaration of cultural survival against insurmountable odds.” Although she could not find anyone in her “immediate community” to explain to her “the intricacies of Ojibway”—different from her experience with getting help on a South Asian language—so that she had to acknowledge “gaps” when teaching the text, she found those “gaps themselves . . . instructive”:

The interruption of English by Ojibway forces us to take cognizance of the colonial nature of the Canadian state, in that no Native language (except in the Northwest Territories) enjoys the status of “official” language in Canada. We are also forced to ponder the fact that Johnston’s fluency in English was forced on him, while we did not have to undergo a forced immersion in Ojibway.²⁵

For Mukherjee, the Ojibway words “are directly metonymic of that cultural difference which is imputed by the linguistic variation,”²⁶ but she

also explains that the fact that “cultural difference” is, for her, not more than a “gap” is an expression of colonial rather than *post*-colonial power relations.²⁷ Based on experiences with student responses to texts that include this type of linguistic variation, I would argue that the inserted words situate the readers: for some they carry more than a metonymic meaning by creating a close, personal link with the text (even if not all words are understood) and granting a certain ownership of this literature, an insider perspective denied to them if the text were written only in English. A similar familiarity is created for Aboriginal readers through the use of the vernacular. Native students in my class enjoyed the stories by Okanagan elder Harry Robinson²⁸ because they were reminded of elders at home. His collaborator Wendy Wickwire successfully preserved, in writing, storytelling as an oral performance by not editing his Rez English and by conveying the rhythm of the telling in the fragmented lines of poetry. Again, for those students, the linguistic variant does not “introduce the culture synecdochally,” as W.D. Ashcroft argues in relation to an African text,²⁹ but validates some aspects of their experiences as Aboriginal people, although not of *all* Aboriginal people.

The device of inserting Indigenous words, phrases, or sentences in an English text varies from author to author and also depends on publication context. In Moses’s and Goldie’s *Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*, the poetry by Louise Halfe and Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm presents a particular challenge because the Ojibway/Anishnabe or Cree words are left untranslated (in contrast to Halfe’s own glossing at the end of her book *Bear Bones & Feathers*); whereas, in Tomson Highway’s excerpt from *The Rez Sisters* and in Gregory Scofield’s poetry, words and phrases are glossed in a footnote. Jeannette Armstrong believes that literature should be clear—“clarity for every person, whether it’s people who are from that cultural group or not,”³⁰ and that for clarity’s sake Indigenous words should be translated in a glossary. However, in her collaboratively written book of meditations *The Native Creative Process* (1991),³¹ in which she creates a whole essay in order to explain one word or phrase in Okanagan, she demonstrates that such translation is complex.

With respect to novels written by Canadian Aboriginal authors, most are in English. An exception is Lorne Simon’s *Stones and Switches* (1994),³² which has a glossary of Mi’kmaq words and phrases at the back of the

book. This was recommended by Jeannette Armstrong in her role as the director of the En'owkin School of Writing where Simon was studying. There are also a few phrases of Cherokee in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (which are left unglossed). In both her novels *Honour the Sun* (1987) and *Silent Words* (1992), Slipperjack avoids what she considers an inappropriate intrusion of glossing and footnoting.³³ Using English throughout, she does not deviate from the first-person narrative voice of her protagonists, but uses other techniques to convey the cross-cultural character of her novels. She may remind her readers of the presence of another language in the following way: "Then the older boy said in Ojibway 'Where did you come from?'"³⁴ Ojibway speakers in my Native literature course liked Slipperjack's way of including "difference" without using translation. They thought the English phrase would give both groups of readers, those fluent in Ojibway and those who are not, the possibility to think seriously about the implications of this question. These students also pointed out that it would have been difficult and problematic to find a standardized Ojibway wording for the phrase, as there are so many dialectic variations of the Ojibway language. In another dialogue from *Silent Words*, quoted earlier in a different context, Slipperjack's translation of Ojibway into English creates a gap between two signifying systems: "'By the way, how long is this trip?' I said in English. He pretended not to hear me, so I switched to Ojibway. 'When are we going to get to where we're going?'"³⁵ The elder's non-verbal response in this novel about silences further highlights cultural difference and a seemingly unbridgeable gap implying that the English language cannot convey the Ojibway culture (in this case, a different time concept). The elder's refusal to understand—although he does understand English—shows his resistance to participate in the hegemonic discourse and, as well, his intention to teach the protagonist his own way of perceiving his world.

In *Silent Words*, the protagonist's search for his mother and for his identity is often tied in with his learning about different types of "languages." As he seems to be almost bilingual, he can converse in both Ojibway and English, but he has to figure out which language is appropriate in a particular situation. It is not just a question of simply switching linguistic codes. The awkwardness of the English version of the question asked in Ojibway signifies a cultural gap between thinking in Ojibway and thinking

in English. Appropriate communication depends on being attuned to a cultural protocol; for example, the passage "Suddenly I said in English, 'Why don't you just go and buy a spoon and not have to go through such pain to make one?'" (32). The context of this quotation clarifies that, even if Danny had said those words in Ojibway, they would have been considered rude because he did not comply with the culturally requested behaviour of non-interference; he did not just "listen, watch and learn" (45), advice he will be taught frequently on his journey. The characters of Mr. and Mrs. Old Indian epitomize the idea that communication is not merely dependent on verbal literacy skills. Danny has to get used to their language because they "did not speak Indian. They were speaking in some kind of strange-sounding English" (50), like: "Da ol' fool 'as let da stobe go out agin" (50). And to make things more confusing for Danny, they pray in Latin! But it is this couple who teaches the boy for the first time about the silent words of non-verbal language: "No one said a word, but we said a lot. I was learning" (61). This newly acquired literacy skill helps Danny later on in a crucial moment of his life when he meets again with his father, who had abused him. "I watched him closely, *reading him* the way Mr. and Mrs. Old Indian had taught me" (234, emphasis added). The novel's inclusive definition of language, even including the languages of the non-human environment, further enhances hybridized cultural (rather than strictly linguistic) literacies:

I looked at Ol' Jim and asked seriously, "Why do people say 'the lonely call of a loon', or 'the eerie hoot of an owl' when I have never heard these things by themselves. There are always two or a whole bunch of them!" Ol' Jim chuckled and said, "Well, when you don't understand the language, all the voices sound the same, don't they?" (159)

Without using "devices of otherness" (Ashcroft's phrase),³⁶ like neologisms or glossing, Slipperjack introduces her readers to different voices—certainly more fully grasped by an Anishnabe person "understanding the language" and knowing about the "other" side of the parallel she is creating. To the monolingual/monocentric reader, all her writing—with exception of "the strange-sounding English" of the Old Indian couple—may "sound the same." However, if one pays attention to the silences of the novel as another language, one may conclude with non-Aboriginal critic Dee Horne that Slipperjack's above-quoted "parallelism strategy" does

not “exemplify colonial mimicry” but, by referring to “implied meanings, the unspoken words and feelings between the lines of print” (a writing style Dee Horne calls “implicature”), “she foregrounds the Ojibway culture.”³⁷

Slipperjack’s narrative technique is quite different from Basil Johnston’s way of writing difference through code-switching. Not only does he insert Ojibway language phrases but in his earlier work, the collection of short stories *Moose Meat and Wild Rice* (1978), he also alternates between an informal and a formal English. For example, in the story “The Honey Pot,” Johnston employs a third-person narrator whose comments in the English of a formally educated person are set off against the dialogues of the Native characters, who speak in a vernacular:

“Hmm,” said Shigun. “Yeah. Mebbe we can take dat honey. Make a good meal dat, and we could split what’s left tree ways.”

They walked thoughtfully back to the shore. All the while Shigun cleaned his pans, he tempted his comrades with thoughts about the goodness of honey. Not only did honey sweeten tea to ambrosia, it turned scone into cake of the finest delicacy. A little honey was good for the flagging energies of man, woman, and child. It turned a meal into a veritable feast.

Adam and Tikip listened, were intrigued, were convinced.

“Hell,” said Tikip looking at the swale, “We’ll never be able to get t’rough dat stuff.”³⁸

This story is one of the examples of “an amusing account of Indian-white man relationships,” Johnston explains in his preface to the collection (9). Neither the formal diction of the narrator nor the demotic English of the characters (with the insertion of the occasional Ojibway word) provides “the authentic” Native voice, but both together signify a complex reality. The hybridity of the textual construction points toward the multiplicity of responses to major changes imposed on Anishnabe people in the 1940s and 1950s, and toward the divisiveness such differences create in the small, forced-together community “about twenty or so miles away . . . of Blunder Bay” (7). It also is a reflection of the composite identities of the “Moose Meat Point Indian Reserve” population, described by Johnston as “westernized in outward appearance but in soul and spirit very much still Ojibway” (7). The characters’ failed attempts at imitating “the white man” illustrate humorously the impossibility of assimilation.

In this particular story about three men trying to find a way to get some honey out of a tree stump, the characters’ involvement with white society is shown by the juxtaposition of their seeming stupidity with the stupidity of European tourists who, watching the men’s struggle with the bees in the water through their binoculars, misinterpret the scene as a verification of their knowledge about “Blood-thirsty savages” (30) and report it to the police as “Indians . . . killing one another” (30). The ignorance and narrow-mindedness revealed in the tourists’ stereotypical thinking foregrounds the resourcefulness rather than the stupidity of the “Moose Meat Point Indians.” Their imagination is not any more misguided than that of the tourists, but the tourists and the police are ultimately the more stupid, since they think they know when in fact they are totally mistaken. Although readers may laugh at the stupid Ojibway characters yelling in pain after being attacked by the bees—

“Eeeeyawh!” gasped Adam.

“Eeeeyawh!” Tikip screamed.

“EEeeeyawh!” bellowed Shigun. (29)

—they will also feel empathy; whereas, they will hardly side with the tourists screaming “with avid bloodlust” (30)—even if it is in “proper” English—“Oh! Murder! Murder!” she howled” (30).

In each of Basil Johnston’s stories, the formally educated narrator mediates between different literacies, commenting on, and in a way “translating,” the unassimilated characters’ diction and behaviour. In Maria Campbell’s *The Stories of the Road Allowance People* (1995), on the other hand, the storytellers’ vernacular is left unmediated; on the contrary, these stories were translated by Campbell in the opposite direction, having “come a long journey to be with us from Mitchif [the language of the Métis] through literal translations through the Queen’s imperial English and back to the Earth in village English.”³⁹ “Village English,” which Campbell explains as “very broken English,”⁴⁰ reads in the story “Jacob” like this:

Dey get married day Indian way
an after dat my granfawder
he help him with all hees doctoring.
Dats dah way he use to be a long time ago.
If dah woman he work
den dah man he help him an if dah man he work

dah woman he help.
You never hears peoples fighting over whose job he was
dey all know what dey got to do to stay alive.⁴¹

The style of Campbell's "village English," explains Susan Gingell, is distinguished by "the syntactical marker of difference known as reduplication, which is a feature of both French and Cree, and therefore Mitchif syntax interacting with English syntax."⁴² Examples of reduplication in the above passage from the story "Jacob" include "*dah woman he work*" or "*dah man he help him*" (emphasis added). The intersecting of languages also shows in the usage of the pronoun "he" to denote both the male and female gender as well as the impersonal "it." Since in most Indigenous languages there are no pronouns signifying gender, Campbell uses one and the same pronoun in all her stories. Through this technique she alerts readers to context, to reading the whole sentence "all at once" in order to understand the meaning of the pronoun. This is exactly the way the Cree language is structured. Further, attention to context is also important in her depiction of the functioning of Métis communities "a long time ago." The storyteller explains indirectly that preconceived gender roles were insignificant; what counted was the job that needed to be done. Her choice of the masculine (instead of the feminine) as the only pronoun may be related to the male perspective of the stories. She explains in the introduction that the old men of her father's generation became her teachers; hence, each story focusses on a male character.

Campbell's use of non-standard orthography and grammar contrasts with Wendy Wickwire's transcription of the stories told to her by the Okanagan elder Harry Robinson. Wickwire explains that "in order to minimize confusion for readers new to these stories," she "edited the pronouns to make them consistent with their antecedents."⁴³ Although Campbell's stories *are* difficult to understand for somebody with a monocentric view and may have to be read several times, the striking difference in her use of pronouns overrides/overwrites "the norm" and, hence, claims a discourse to be understood on its own terms.

In her introduction to the story about Jacob quoted above, Campbell asserts a cultural way of thinking that, although affected by the Europeans, was not destroyed by them. Instead of providing such comments at the end, she begins her tale with them, emphasizing a history that started

before colonization. The colonial story she is about to tell leads back to "day Indian way" told by Mistupuch, who "never gets a whitemans name" (89). It is the tale about the man Jacob, who had been taken to a residential school when he was very young and who came back to the community many years after his parents' death. Totally uprooted, with a new language and a new name, he did not know his family history and ended up marrying his sister, who eventually committed suicide. Campbell tells this story as one of the stories "*of the*" people, as the title of her collection emphasizes, in a voice not "authentic" but constructed as other than "the Queen's imperial English." Here, she indeed seems to practise the "abrogation or denial of the privilege of English"⁴⁴ by self-consciously othering her storytelling. Marilyn Dumont, like Campbell of Métis background, calls this "resistance writing" or, sarcastically, "the devil's language":

as if violating God the Father and standard English
is like talking back(wards)
as if speaking the devil's language is
talking back
back (words)⁴⁵

Jacob, in Campbell's story, does "talk back," explaining to the priest who wants to convince him that suffering in residential schools is good for the children because Jesus suffered too: "But day Jesus he never lose his language an hees peoples" (95). There is no code-switching in the stories in the sense that the priests would speak in proper English as in Basil Johnston's *Moose Meat and Wild Rice*, but Cree words are woven into the text. As in her other stories, Campbell emphasizes Cree names since naming is linked to cultural identity. Her narrator points out Mistupuch, the one who "never gets a whitemans name," as the one who "knowed lots of stories" (89). Naming is of special significance in "Jacob" as the colonizers' renaming of the people led to an erasure of their identity in relation to their family history and ultimately caused a person's death. If Jacob had known his father's "Indian name," the tragedy would have never happened; in a small way this story illustrates how cultural genocide cannot be separated from physical genocide. Indirectly, the name "Jacob" links her story with the genocide of the Jewish people, as it was Jacob to whom God had promised, in his dream of a ladder reaching into heaven, the well-being of his people. He eventually re-named Jacob Israel. The story

from the Old Testament is a foundational narrative in Jewish beliefs, although, in the face of centuries of persecution, also contested.

Campbell's narratives are stories told from the "Halfbreed" perspective, with *their* definition of "dat word 'civilize'" (75) and *their* understanding of education as *edjication/ejication*. If a non-Métis audience has to make a special effort to understand the "backwards" language, they should be reminded of Gloria Anzaldúa's reasoning (which contrasts Armstrong's concern for clarity for *all* readers):

Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas, Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without always having to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.⁴⁶

Like some of Louise Halfe's poetry and like the dialogues in Basil Johnston's stories, the narratives of the so-called Road Allowance People must be read aloud in order to be understood at all; it is spoken English that is brought onto the page. Maria Campbell transcribed the stories given to her orally in the fragmented lines of poetry: such visual arrangement draws attention to the distinctiveness of the stories as a hybrid genre—the blending of the oral and the written becomes a blending of prose and poetry. This form of "interfusional literature," as Thomas King calls it,⁴⁷ may be motivated by "the desire to script rhythms."⁴⁸ Wendy Wickwire thus explains her choice of lineation for Robinson's narratives: "I have therefore set the stories in lines which mirror as closely as possible Harry's rhythm of speech."⁴⁹ Campbell and Halfe (as well as Wickwire) appropriate the genre of poetry for their own uses; they utilize the oral quality of poetry (which, like the Native narratives, should be read aloud) without abiding by other genre definitions like metaphoric language or lyricism. The use of an "Indigenized English"⁵⁰ parallels the indigenization of a genre that should, therefore, be evaluated in its own context.

Besides the fragmented poetry line, italics may be used as a device to highlight the oral, as in Louise Halfe's *Blue Marrow* and in the novels *Stones and Switches* by Mi'kmaq author Lorne Simon and *Keeper 'N Me* by Anishnabe novelist Richard Wagamese. Halfe uses both, the genre of poetry and the italics, to script "different" voices or, as she puts it, to let

"our memory and our talk . . . walk on paper."⁵¹ In her historical narrative *Blue Marrow*, passages in conventional typeset alternate with italicized stanzas. For example, the section quoted in the beginning of this chapter is followed by lines in italics, which, in this instance, signify a change in perspective: after telling the story about the impact of European immigration on her people, emphasizing colonial attitudes, the narrator focusses on her grandfather and his view:

*We were eating summer pups,
buffalo heaped in sour heat—
no rabbits,
no berries
to fill our dying bellies.
Our warriors crying,
the Sundance tree
falling
from the paskisikana.
Ghost Dancers in
bleeding shirts
We were dying. We were
dying. Dying. (62)*

Here, as Méira Cook says, "The use of italics . . . acts as a border between the living and the dead, between the colonizer's language and the 'whispering' but subversive words of the dispossessed."⁵² Whereas in the stanza in conventional font, the marginalization of the narrator's people is emphasized, the telling of her own story a mere afterthought ("Later, driving home"), in the lines above it is Grandfather speaking, "*bent over the paper leaves*" (62), followed by a conversation with Grandmother, who responds by saying that "*River blood will always be our milk. / This talk will stain the leaves*" (62). Spoken in the context of treaty-making processes (the paper leaves), her words are a warning to her husband not to lose touch with the strength to be gained from nature. Because, if he does, not only the paper leaves but also the leaves of trees will be stained. Hence Grandfather ends up

*drawing suns
moons
lakes
winds and grass. (63)*

In the above example, Halfe uses the typographic device of italicizing to highlight the oral voice of elders, which, for many Native people, would be considered the “authentic” cultural voice. However, I maintain that the *whole* history that Halfe is telling is rendered from the perspective of a Cree person; it seems to me that each voice contributes to a fuller understanding, each one truthful and “authentic” in its own way, a layering of different stories (often not clearly distinguished) summarized in the syncretic image of the title: “blue marrow.”⁵³

Similar to Halfe’s use of italics to accentuate different voices and thus perspectives, Lorne Simon employs typographic variation in the characterization of the protagonist Megwadesk in his novel *Stones and Switches*. Overall narrated from a third-person point of view, the thoughts of the main character are set off through italicization. Again, this device highlights an oral and a distinctly Aboriginal, in this case Mi’kmaq, voice because these thoughts are interior monologues in which the protagonist Megwadesk is literally speaking to himself, often inserting Mi’kmaq words. Like the textual divisions formed in Basil Johnston’s short stories, the style of these monologues is distinguished from the omniscient narrator’s descriptions in standard English. In the juxtaposition of these two styles, a written, more objective and comprehensive, view is visually separated from an “oral,” more subjective, questioning of the situation. The novel tells the story of Megwadesk, caught in a conflict that is only partly solved at the end. Megwadesk has bad luck with his fishing, but the reasons for his lack of success are complex, part of a web of connections he is trying to understand. Using the conversational style of interior monologues—or dialogues with Nisgam (God)—Simon draws the reader into the main character’s philosophical musings:

It’s our silly old beliefs, eh, that keep us from getting anywhere, he thought. Everything is taboo with us, eh. An’ these beliefs go deeper than the head. Nisgam, just look at me, eh? Last night I could’ve taken advantage of Skoltch’s net but I ran away instead! An’ why? ‘Cause I was afraid of the spirits getting back at me! (18)

As only the reader, and no other character, is privy to Megwadesk’s thoughts, the reader understands best the confusion this character is in and the different positions he moves back and forth between—the “old beliefs” that his future wife Mimi adheres to, on the one side, and the

Christian, in particular Catholic, religion on the other side. The reader knows about Megwadesk’s doubts, but also, in the non-italicized text, learns about validations of Mi’kmaq beliefs, for example in the characterization of the two ministers. The Catholic priest is punished for not honouring Mi’kmaq ways, and the Protestant minister prefers to tell Megwadesk and Mimi a spider, rather than a Bible, story.

These and other events, together with the fact that Mimi helps him to get his fishing luck back with her so-called superstitions, convince Megwadesk toward the end that Mi’kmaq beliefs are as powerful as Christian beliefs. In a chapter titled “The Second Coming,” this character is also told it will be Gluskeb who will return, rather than Jesus. The allusion to an important figure in Mi’kmaq oral traditions—in his Christ-like role comparable to Nanabush, Raven, Coyote, or Weesageechak in the oral traditions of other First Nations—implies the hoped-for end to colonization.⁵⁴ In the version of the story about Gluskeb’s departure recorded by the Baptist minister Silas T. Rand in 1869 (and as told by Josiah Jeremy), the narrative ends with: “Glooscap went on his way. The Micmacs expect his return in due time, and look for the end of their oppressions and troubles when he comes back.”⁵⁵ Megwadesk experiences, individually and together with his community, many “oppressions and troubles,” among others from the stone-throwing non-Mi’kmaq people whom he finds so powerful that he wonders if a belief in the return of Gluskeb—that is, in their own power—is not just “wishful thinking” (45). He knew that “nothing he did in his dreams could stop the stones falling from the bridge” (146).

References to such hostility, mentioned throughout the novel, complicate further the duality of the title. Stones and switches are described as powerful objects; within Mi’kmaq culture they are associated with spiritual power. The switches of Old Molly may be used for healing but also as evil power, whereas Mimi’s rocks or stones are seen as only good (23). Contact with European society creates another layer to these meanings: stones, rocks may become objects of physical violence (also reminiscent of the Oka crisis) or they may be commercialized, thus violating the culture spiritually (in Mimi’s but not Megwadesk’s opinion). The double meaning of stones signifies the confusion created by colonization; however, the distinction between good and bad medicine had always been part of the

cultural discourse so that European interference gave added meaning to something that was part of an ongoing debate, nothing static. On the other hand, the change from a land-related to a human-centred world view imposed by Christianization made the “switching” (another double meaning in the title of the novel)—from Mi’kmaq to Christian and, in addition, among Christian denominations—disorienting for a young person like Megwadesk.⁵⁶

Through the technique of interior monologues, Simon creates an audience “listening” to his musings. Because of the use of Mi’kmaq words, the audience is placed as either Mi’kmaq or non-Mi’kmaq speakers and will interact with the character accordingly. Each in their own way will, as Native American writer and scholar Louis Owens explains, “contribute a wealth of . . . knowledge to the telling of . . . [the] story, to thus actively participate in the dynamics of the story’s creation.”⁵⁷ Hence, through this technique the novel succeeds in creating a link with storytelling performances. Further, by including numerous references to “old beliefs” contained in the oral tradition, like the Gluskeb stories, and in the detailed telling of a story about Nujisawed, *The One Who Weaves*, this “Indyun” writer is “movin’ between” two different literary discourses. On the one hand, Simon works in the “foreign” medium of the novel, as Owens explains, an “intensely egocentric genre,” signed by him as the author, and, on the other hand, he incorporates stories passed down for centuries, a “communal, authorless” literature. Hence, Simon creates a composite work by highlighting the complex discourse on Mi’kmaq traditions in a double-voiced narrative. He also “plays off and moves beyond (and challenges the reader to likewise move beyond) this faint trace of ‘Rousseauist’ ethnostalgia—most common to Euroamerican treatments of Native American Indians—toward an affirmation of a *syncretic, dynamic, adaptive* identity in contemporary America” (emphasis added).⁵⁸

The only other Indigenous novel written in Canada that alludes to dualities already in the wording of the title, apart from Thomas King’s *Truth & Bright Water*, predicated on his juxtaposition of two communities, is Wagamese’s *Keeper ’N Me*, published in the same year as *Stones and Switches*. The wording of the title *Keeper ’N Me* promises not only a different English but also a focus on two characters, and the discursively linked persons are not only the two main characters—Keeper and Garnet

Raven—but also the two narrators. The italics in this novel are used not to set apart an/other voice within one character, but to distinguish between two characters/narrators. Because of their double role, they are tellers as well as listeners.

Their stories are told side by side—sometimes the same event told from each perspective—but the two characters also listen to each other as the plot evolves. Garnet, the younger one, learns from the teachings of the elder called Keeper, which he incorporates into his life and thus into his story about his homecoming; Keeper, on the other hand, who, in the telling of the story, “just come[s] along for the ride, make sure he’s doin’ right” (4), relates his part as a commentary on Garnet’s experiences. Therefore, Wagamese includes, not only through the conversational style (in which especially Keeper expresses himself), but also in the dialogic voice, a link with the oral traditions in which, as Owen states, “speaker and listener are coparticipants in the telling of a story.”⁵⁹ As the teachings of Keeper are visibly set off as “different” by means of italicization, one may assume at first glance that Wagamese wants to give priority to a so-called authentic voice; however, his story is intertwined with Garnet’s. The young man has been taken away from his family as a small child and is now reconnecting with family and community. When he arrives on the White Dog Reserve, he is very confused, lost, and therefore called by Keeper “a real tourist” (3), but that does not mean that Keeper himself has arrived at “the truth.” He explains to Garnet, for whom he wants to be a guide, that in the same way as Garnet lost a number of years in his life because of the interference of Children’s Aid Society, he himself lost many years because of his alcohol addiction.

“Been gone long time myself. Could use a good guide too. See, you’n me got a lot in common. Lotsa things the same. You, you’re tryin’ to learn to fit in, tryin’ to be at home here, tryin’ to win back all them years got stolen on you. Me, same thing. Got a lotta years to win back.” (73)

The similarities Keeper repeatedly observes between himself and Garnet de-essentialize his talk as an elder. His acknowledgement of his own continuous search—“we’re all tourists” (2)—takes away any pretense of authority and makes him believable as a human being. A similar effect is achieved by his humour. Although he believes, or maybe I should say,

because he believes, in traditional values, his often inserted “heh, heh, heh” after he explains something counteracts or even subverts any interpretation of a lesson that might be too dogmatic. Further, his dualistic biological identity construction of “Indyuns” and “Whites” in analogy to the distinction between a beaver and a bear (37) is mitigated by the image of a composite identity at the end of the novel. After Garnet has completed his vision quest, his mother gives him a ribbon shirt, which is made in the traditional style but from clothes he wore before he knew what it means “to be an Indyun” (and tried on an Afro-Canadian identity):

As I unfolded the shirt the material felt familiar. It wasn't until I had it all held out in front of me that I knew what it was. It was the balloon-sleeved yellow shirt I had on the day I arrived at White Dog. The sleeves were cut back regular, the long pointed collar was gone and the ribbons ran across the chest and back and down the arms. It was beautiful. (209)

When the mother further explains that our “way got *built onto* the way you had to grow up” (209, emphasis added), Wagamese seems to express a similar thought as Cree writer Seesequasis, from the same generation of Canadian First Nations authors but from a different—yet linguistically closely related—nation, whom I quoted in the beginning of this chapter: “Nothing is pure and the only two constants are love and change. In these new meetings I think the trickster can thrive.”⁶⁰ The transformer/ teacher/trickster, in the novel embodied in the humorous teacher, Keeper, is linked here to an “impure,” “movin’ between” existence and cultural identity. Further, it should be noted that Keeper identifies the “real Indyun” against the foil of “that Hollywood kind” (4). In a nutshell, his juxtaposition exposes the two types of essentialism explained by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith cited earlier, one used strategically by Aboriginal peoples to empower themselves and the other used by outsiders to further disempower Aboriginal peoples. “Real Indyun” from an “Indyun’s” perspective is not understood as an easily definable, unchangeable entity but as “syncretic, dynamic, adaptive,” as Owens states. In this sense, the novel *Keeper 'N Me*, which may easily be read with some “Rousseauist’ ethnostalgia,” challenges the reader—any reader—to “move beyond” set cultural boundaries and join the border crossings of the trickster.

TRAVELLING KNOWLEDGES