

Dossier Presentation
In Search of New Paradigms: Indigenous Studies in Canada
and in the Americas

A Literature is political in that its linguistic and ideological transmission is defined and determined by those in power. This is why Shakespeare rather than Wisakehcha is classified as “classical” in our school curriculum.
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“In the beginning it was the Word”, so says the sacred scripture that is the fundamental stone of Christianity: the Bible. After so many centuries and millenniums, so many territories conquered and devastated, we are left with the disquieting question: “what if the principle is prior to the initially established point?” This is the questioning pushing and instigating us, researchers dedicated to the study of a literature that defies the initially demarcated point for the literary history of the Americas, as well as invites us to reconfigure our artistic and cultural maps in the same way we defy cartographic maps where Europe appears as the central continent in Planet Earth.

It also seems to be the restlessness with what the Western world has defined as the point of origin for the narrative of the American continent one of the best propellers for literary and theoretical-critical indigenous works, as Thomas King (Cherokee-Greek) well humouredly demonstrates in the chapter “Forget Columbus” in his *The inconvenient Indian: a curious account of Native people in North America* (2012, p. 1-20): the need for rewriting and revising this historical discourse about the Americas “sacramented” by the point of view of the European colonizer. The intense production of critical, theoretical and literary work turned to indigenous questions in the Americas and the significant corpus of work produced by Amerindian authors signals to the relevant space occupied by indigenous literature in contemporary academic discourse.

Referring to Canadian Studies, Canadian literary critics recognize that nowadays it is difficult to imagine writing about Canada without the presence of indigenous literature.

As Heather Macfarlane and Armand Garnet Ruffo state in *Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada* (2016, p. xi), “Along the proliferation of creative writing has come a deluge of scholarly attention and, since the early 1990s, there has been no less than a steady production of critical work that has served to open the literature to analysis”. This proliferation of indigenous production is observed in other forms of art as well, as in music, theatre, film and painting, not only in Canada, but throughout the Americas, in performances that also involve themselves discursively in transcultural and transamerican strategies of cultural resistance to past and present colonial practices.

Creative resistance strategies involve, in a categorical way, rethinking what we call the “beginning” in the literature of the Americas, whose history dates back to the arrival of the colonizers as its initial point for the production of a literary corpus. Nevertheless, ancestral knowledges from the diverse indigenous nations, alive and pulsating in the American territory way before the arrival of Christopher Columbus, have always peopled with mythical narratives, tales and storytelling performances as the fundamental point of knowledge maintaining (that include languages, cosmogonies, history, political and social organizations and spirituality) and the continuity of the peoples themselves. This was the largest resistance, and it is the presence of ancestral knowledges in the literature and in the art of indigenous peoples that invites us to rethink our theoretical and methodological presuppositions and to rewrite the literary history of the Americas. Thus, this issue of *Interfaces Brasil/Canada* presents texts that contemplate indigenous literatures and other forms of cultural expression, in Canada, Brazil and the Americas, in search of new paradigms for our literary and cultural studies.

According to LaRoque’s (*Métis*) thinking in the epigraph, Jo-Ann Episkewew (*Métis*) reminds that the incorporation of “Native Lit” courses and anthologies is more recent in Canada, unlike the United States, where N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) received a *Pulitzer Prize* in 1969 and in 1974 the *New York Times Book Review* published a critical review of an indigenous novel, *Winter in the blood* (1974), by James Welch (Blackfeet-Gros Ventre). Many USian anthologies include writers like Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Gerald Vizenor (Chippewa), Sherman Alexie (Spokane-Coeur D’Alene) and several other indigenous writers are academics and have produced

literary theory as well, as Louis Owens (Chocktaw-Cherokee-Irish), Craig Womack (Creek-Cherokee), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow-Creek-Sioux) e Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) for at least four decades. But "Canadian Aboriginal Literature is knocking on the door of the Canadian Literary Canon," says Episkenew (2016, p. 189) and publishing critical texts about their literature and about how mainstream literature represents them for at least two decades now, in the voices of Tomson Highway (Cree), Thomas King, Lee Maracle (Salish) e Janice Acoose (Sakimay *Métis*), among many others. Thomas King declares the term post colonial unacceptable in relation to indigenous literatures. He calls the triumvirate – pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial – “undisguised ethnocentrism” and “well intentioned disconsideration”. King places the problems with the term in its “inescapable nationalism” and in “the dangerous belief that the starting point of any discussion is the arrival of Europeans to North America” (1997, p. 242).

It is also necessary to consider, as Helen Hoy reminds us that

Native writing, editing, publishing, performing, reviewing, teaching, and reading necessarily take place, at least partially, in contexts shaped and controlled by the discursive and institutional power of the dominant culture [in Canada]. Editorial boards, granting agencies, publishing companies, awards committees, reviewers, audiences and purchasers, university and school curricula, and scholarly theorizing and analysis (of which this book is an instance) assess merit, distribute resources, enact policies of inclusion and exclusion, and produce meanings based on norms extrinsic to, even inimical, to Native values and interests. Such effects are neither accidental nor simply idiosyncratic (2001, p. 13).

In the Brazilian academy indigenous literatures appear scantily, included in English or Postcolonial Literature courses, analyzed in a fragmented way and an insistent post colonial view. Brazilian indigenous authors rarely escape classification as children’s or juvenile literature for lack of understanding about the influence of orality in their writing. On the other hand, recent legislation offers the opportunity of introducing it in schools in a more consistent way³. From the end of the 1980s on, Brazilian Indians started to get more recognition through their works about their cultures and myths and at least thirty indigenous authors with relevant work are recognized. As Daniel Munduruku points out, “it is important to say that we are conquering space not because we are ‘exotic’, but

because we write well”.⁴ Brazilian academy, nevertheless, does not yet receive well the work of indigenous writers, not even that of the two most popular ones, Eliane Potiguara and Daniel Munduruku, who have books as *Metade cara, metade máscara* (Half face, half mask) and *Todas as coisas são pequenas* (All things are small) disconsidered as novels and thus “not includable” in Brazilian Literature academic courses.

Eliane Potiguara is a writer, poet and activist for indigenous rights and all her rich experience is elaborated in *Metade cara, metade máscara* (2004) under several narrative forms – testimony, poetry, auto fiction, fiction – that interlace to recover her physical and intellectual wanderings, the struggle for self esteem and for the maintenance of her cultural tradition and for the recovery of identity and dignity by the indigenous woman, in the same line followed by most USian and Canadian authors mentioned here. Potiguara’s book is similar in structure to *I am woman*, by Lee Maracle, for example.⁵ Potiguara’s book, as Acoose’s and other indigenous women auto fictions, defies classification: it is not a novel, although it contains the story of Jurupiranga and Cunhataí; it is not autobiography, but tells about readings and wanderings, learning, ideas and the author’s memories, confused with those of her grandmother and of her alter ego, Cunhataí; it is not a book of poems, but several of them cut into her poetic narrative; it is not a militant book, but it does a relentless defense of the rights of indigenous people in her country, especially those of women and the oppressed of the world at large, claiming for radical changes. The work may be called metaficcional and post canonic for it inserts the Amerindian voice in the national Indianist Literature and unveils an alternative point of view to that of non-indigenous writers about the colonial and postcolonial encounter with the founding ethnic groups in Brazilian Literature, also for her aligning with the Afro-Brazilian movements. Inserting this type of text in our academic courses widens the very notion of Brazilian Literature and the definition of “novel”, as well as our perception of our cultural heritage.

In *Todas as coisas são pequenas* (2007), Munduruku makes the first attempt of a Brazilian Indian writer to formally insert himself in the western novelistic genre. In an analysis of his work, Eurídice Figueiredo points out two characteristics: “a polarized vision in which people from the civilized world have excessive materialistic aims while the indigenous world is integrated with the forces of nature” and his affiliation to “the

long tradition of the novel of ordeal, for his character must pass a series of steps and only after fulfilling the tasks proposed he can come out a winner” (2010, p. 132). Munduruku maintains in his work the purpose of deconstructing the image of the Indian as “savage” and “without a culture”.

The interest of non indigenous authors by the theme in Brazil must be pointed out, for it is noticeable that most Brazilian great writers have passed by Indianity, with at least one book that revisits it under a contemporary look: Moacyr Scliar, Luiz Antonio de Assis Brasil, Bernardo Carvalho, Alberto Mussa, Murilo Carvalho, Antonio Torres, Milton Hatoum, João Ubaldo Ribeiro, to mention only some of the works published in this century, except for *Ubaldo's Feitiço da Ilha do Pavão*, from 1997.

The texts that appear in this dossier reveal the diversity of the theme proposed by representing several ethnic groups in Brazil, Canada and Panama, including *Métis* and *Innu*, who write in Portuguese, English and French. The authors of the texts are colleagues, professors of Literature from Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, RJ; Universidade Federal do Rio Grande, RS; Universidade Regional Integrada do Alto Uruguai e das Missões, Frederico Westphalen Campus, RS; Universidade Federal da Paraíba, João Pessoa, PB; University of Alberta, Canada; Tarrant County College, Trinity River Campus, Forth Worth, Texas; Université Rennes 2/Institut Universitaire de France, Rennes, Brittany ; one poet and literary translator and a Doctoral student whose research and teaching contribute to the knowledge of Indigenous Literatures of the Americas and to the formation of new professors and researchers who can carry on this Inter-American project, once, as we can see, dialogue amongst themselves contribute to the debate about the theme, as proposed by our CFP.

By coincidence, four of the seven texts focus on the literature written by women, indigenous and not indigenous and demonstrate that indigenous women still fight negative stereotypes that oscilate between the princess or the *squaw*⁶, while they ‘struggle to make visible experiences of wife battering, child abuse and sexual abuse’, inside and outside Native communities, that include an oppressive past and an uncertain future (VALASKAKIS, 2016, p. 94-95), and are acquiring a noticeable visibility for their work and the themes they propose.

Representations of the autochthons in Canadian novels: territoriality, alterity, identity, by Eurídice Figueiredo, analyses Canadian novels in English and in French with indigenous and *Métis* characters and their difficulties of insertion in a society that dispenses more consideration for immigrants than to their Native peoples, discriminating mainly the mixed bloods, “the other difficult to be integrated” for inhabiting an in-between racial and social place; a permanently “dislocated” being. Among the works in French we have Francine Ouellette, Gérard Bouchard, Bertrand Vac, Julien Bigras and Jacques Poulin. The English language authors are Margaret Laurence and Beatrice Culleton Mosoinier, a *Métis* writer. The works are of a large diversity and cover from historical aspects of this ongoing conflict and its psychological consequences and autobiographical influences of personal experiences of discrimination.

The end of hybridity: Self-indigenization in *Métis* literature, by Albert Braz, discusses the reaction to theories about hybridity, racial and cultural, beginning in the 1990s, especially in *Métis* literature, where the preference appears to be for identification with only one of the racial (and/or cultural) progenitors or the denial of white progenitors. Indigenous intellectuals still divide themselves about the *Métis*, seen by some as negative figures for indianity, while others refuse the notion for believing that it favors migrants and diasporic movements, ignoring the relationship of indigenous peoples with the continent they have inhabited for some many centuries prior to the arrival of Europeans and Africans, among others. It is a very complex discussion that involves, for example, the concept of existence of “pure” races, as the white and the indigenous.

The arrows of Olowaili: sound, movement and Guna culture in Monique Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, by Daniel Wayne Hopkins, goes from the traditional art of the *mola* confection, the traditional indigenous blouse appreciated by the art of its embroidery, to the discussion of Mojica’s theatrical play, where traces of the author’s autobiography mix themselves with the history of her Guna people, in Panama as well as the one transplanted to New York City. The narrative includes her relations with several other indigenous peoples of the Americas and their common history throughout the colonial process. Mojica creates 22 different characters, from *Pocahontas* and *La*

Malinche to Contemporary Woman, whose “testimonies” attest the quality and longevity of oral traditions in the Americas and their importance to the reconstruction of Indian women’s identity, since performance has a healing process within Native cultures.

"Female Amerindian voices and the writing of space", by Rita Olivieri-Godet, reveals to us the work of Naomi Fontaine, young *Innu* writer from the community of Uashat, near Sept-Isles, the eastern tip of Quebec, who published *Kuessipan* when she was 23 years old. The narrative traces a portrait of the nomad community of fishermen and hunters, especially that of mothers and their children, who endure a harsh and cruel reality with quiet dignity. The book is traversed by a sense of time and place quite palpable, the natural beauty of the bay and domestic crises between generations. The author observes with special attention the unequal interaction process between the Native community and Canadians, with emphasis on the female voice. Godet also recovers for the readers the history of the Uashat reservation and of the indigenous resistance in the 1950s decade, that promoted deep changes in the indigenous habitat due to diverse and successive interventionist activities through the centuries.

The text "A new old story: O *Karaíba* and the ancestral pre-cabralian memory", by Denise Almeida Silva, focuses on the literary production of Brazil when she reflects on the work of Daniel Munduruku and Eliane Potiguara and allies herself strongly to the purpose of searching for new paradigms for literary and cultural studies mainly when it refers to the literature by indigenous authors. The central focus is the analysis of *O Karaíba*, work by Daniel Munduruku and how the author reclaims in his text the ancestral memory of pre-cabralian times in Brazil and deconstructs the image of the Indian as a savage and backward human being, while inscribing importance to embodied memory, strong and profoundly linked to a place lived in and worshiped. The intercrossing of thoughts about indigenous culture from the ideas of Munduruku and of Potiguara and the studies of the nature of social memory in closed communities developed by non indigenous researchers contributes to the creation of diverse paradigms for the study of indigenous culture and literature.

"Voices of Native writers of the Americas: resistance in verse form in Canada and in Brazil", by Liane Schneider, focuses on Native women’s writing and starts from an inter American comparative perspective and from the links established among cultures

of oral and written tradition when she analyses poems by Rita Joe and Eliane Potiguara. Schneider verifies traces of trauma suffered by Amerindians in the centuries that followed European colonizing and she highlights the place taken by the lyric I through the voice of the Indigenous woman and argues about how literature, in this case poetic discourse, contributes to unmask power arrangements.

The text "The myth of fire and the (re)construction of indigenous identity in *The lesser blessed*, by Richard Van Camp, and *Habitante irreal*, by Paulo Scott", by Régis Azevedo Garcia e Rubelise da Cunha, also compares a Canadian and a Brazilian work, problematizing the encounter between the two western cultures and the Amerindian cultures and the heterogeneous literature resulting from such encounter. The authors analyze how mythical narratives about fire and the human genesis are rescued and ressignified in the novels *Habitante irreal* (Unreal inhabitant, 2011), by the Brazilian writer Paulo Scott and *The lesser blessed* (1996) by Dogrib-Canadian author Richard Van Camp, by being transformed in personal narratives that denounce the violence suffered by indigenous populations in the urban centers.

At the end of the dossier, we have two book reviews. One of them, by Núbia Hanciau, on the novel *Danse noir*, by the Franco-Canadian writer Nancy Houston, complements and reaffirms the discussions about about the indigenous question in Brazil and Canada. In her detailed review, in which the book is analyzed within the chain of works by the writer, profound connoisseur of Houston that she is, Hanciau highlights how the three stories of generations, portrayed in the novel, are tied to the history of systemic violence delivered by the colonial process unto the Amerindian. It is Milo, the son of the Cree Indian Awinita, who goes through the paths that link the Canadian colonial experience to the Brazilian one, since, as Hanciau says, the “‘ta, ta-da da, ta, ta-da da’ of the drum, the rhythm Milo and Paul listen to every night in Arraial d’Ajuda (...) is the call from the heart, from the roots, from the voice of his mother”.

Brian Campbell comments the publication, in Montreal, of a poem collection by novelist, short story writer, essayist and poet from São Paulo, Zulmira Tavares, *Vesuvio/Vesuvius*, translated into English by Hugh Hazelton with the significant support of the *Canadian Council for the Arts*. Translated by a poet who is comfortable with English,

French, Spanish and Portuguese, the work results in a reading that preserves the original lyricism and the tone of Tavares's reflections about expectations and disappointments in art and life, some "volcanic", her critical reflections always combined with ironic humor in prose or poetry. Such a publication reflects the profitable cultural exchange between Brazilian and Canadian scholars in the several encounters promoted by ABECAN. Hazelton saw Tavares's work for the first time when he was invited to translate two of her poems for *revue ellipse* (TORRES, SANTOS, 2010), *Abaixo da linha de pobreza* (Below the poverty line, p. 46-47) and *Jibóia* (Boa, p. 50-51).

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Notes

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- ³ Law nº 11.645, March 10, 2008 turns mandatory the teaching of Afro Brazilian and Indigenous history and culture in all levels of school curricula. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2007-2010/2008/lei/111645.htm
- ⁴ www.almanaquebrasil.com.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10634:daniel-munduruku&catid=12956:cultura&Itemid=168 - 54k. Acessado em 22/02/2012.
- ⁵ Eloína Santos, Come on, Sister (p. 47-62), and Rubelise da Cunha, Writers and storytellers: Lee Maracle, Eliane Potiguara and the consolidation of Indigenous Literatures in Canada and in Brazil (p. 63-82), are texts that compare the work of Potiguara to those of Acoose and Maracle, respectively. In *Interfaces Brasil/Canadá*. Vol. 12, no.12, UFF e Centro Universitário La Salle, 2012.
- ⁶ "Squaw" is an Algonquin word that has been in circulation in American literature and language since the 16th century and has been generally understood to mean "an Indian woman", or "wife", but has been used derogatorily to describe those who maintained relationships with white Christian men, as hunters, lumbermen or explorers, including by their companions themselves.