

# Indigenous Literatures at the Crossroads of Languages: Approches and Avenues

## Les littératures autochtones au carrefour des langues : approches et pistes

Malou Brouwer

Volume 3, Number 3, 2023

Imaginer des constellations linguistiques et théoriques pour l'étude  
des littératures autochtones  
Imagining Linguistic and Theoretical Constellations for the Study of  
Indigenous Literatures

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108793ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29173/af29492>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of Alberta, Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies

ISSN

1916-8470 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Brouwer, M. (2023). Indigenous Literatures at the Crossroads of Languages:  
Approches and Avenues. *Alternative francophone*, 3(3), 10–31.  
<https://doi.org/10.29173/af29492>

Article abstract

This article examines critical discourses and approaches for the study of Indigenous literatures across languages. On the one hand, it investigates how the French-English divide is challenged by Indigenous authors and how it has been and can be further dealt with in Indigenous literary studies (ILS). On the other hand, it pays attention to the centrality and revitalization of Indigenous languages as they challenge colonial languages, complicate the French-English divide in ILS, and center Indigenous experiences. Engaging with the question “what approaches can scholars, teachers, and students in Indigenous literary studies use for the study of Indigenous literatures at the crossroads of languages?”, I highlight multilingual work by Indigenous authors, collect resources that directly engage Indigenous literatures from a (multi)language perspective, and gather approaches that can be helpful in developing a framework for the study of the multilingual corpus of Indigenous literatures.

© Malou Brouwer, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

# Indigenous Literatures at the Crossroads of Languages: Approaches and Avenues

 alternative francophone  
pour une francophonie en mode mineur

<https://doi.org/10.29173/af29492>



*Malou Brouwer*

[maloubrouwer@gmail.com](mailto:maloubrouwer@gmail.com)

University of Alberta

**Abstract.** *This article examines critical discourses and approaches for the study of Indigenous literatures across languages. On the one hand, it investigates how the French-English divide is challenged by Indigenous authors and how it has been and can be further dealt with in Indigenous literary studies (ILS). On the other hand, it pays attention to the centrality and revitalization of Indigenous languages as they challenge colonial languages, complicate the French-English divide in ILS, and center Indigenous experiences. Engaging with the question “what approaches can scholars, teachers, and students in Indigenous literary studies use for the study of Indigenous literatures at the crossroads of languages?”, I highlight multilingual work by Indigenous authors, collect resources that directly engage Indigenous literatures from a (multi)language perspective, and gather approaches that can be helpful in developing a framework for the study of the multilingual corpus of Indigenous literatures.*

**Keywords:** *comparative Indigenous literature; francophone Indigenous literatures; multilingualism; language; Indigenous literary studies*

**Résumé.** *Cet article se penche sur les discours et les approches critiques pour l'étude des littératures autochtones à travers les langues. D'une part, il étudie la manière dont les auteurs autochtones remettent en question le fossé français-anglais et la manière dont il a été et peut être traité dans les études littéraires*

*autochtones. D'autre part, il s'intéresse à la centralité et à la revitalisation des langues autochtones dans la mesure où elles remettent en question les langues coloniales, compliquent le fossé français-anglais dans les études littéraires autochtones et sont au cœur des expériences autochtones. En répondant à la question "quelles approches les chercheurs, les enseignants et les étudiants en études littéraires autochtones peuvent-ils utiliser pour étudier les littératures autochtones à la croisée des langues ?", je mets en lumière les œuvres multilingues d'auteurs autochtones, je rassemble des ressources qui traitent des littératures autochtones d'une point de vue de la langue et/ou du multilinguisme et je rassemble des approches qui peuvent être utiles pour développer un cadre en vue de l'étude du corpus multilingue des littératures autochtones.*

**Mots clés :** *littérature autochtone comparée; littérature autochtones francophones; multilinguisme; langue; études littéraires autochtones*

In the 2010 special issue of *Studies in Canadian Literatures/Études en littératures canadiennes (SCL/ELC)*, "Indigeneity in Dialogue: Indigenous Literary Expression Across Linguistic Divides," Michèle Lacombe, Heather MacFarlane, and Jennifer Andrews call for more critical work covering a multilingual corpus and examining the linguistic dimensions of Indigenous literatures. This article responds directly to their call by examining critical discourses and approaches for the study of Indigenous literatures across languages. On the one hand, the article investigates how the French-English divide is challenged by Indigenous authors and how it has been and can be further dealt with in Indigenous literary studies (ILS). On the other hand, the article pays attention to Indigenous languages as they challenge colonial languages, complicate the French-English divide in ILS and center Indigenous experiences. Engaging with the question "What approaches can scholars, teachers, and students in Indigenous literary studies use for the study of Indigenous literatures at the crossroads of languages?", I highlight multilingual work by Indigenous authors, collect resources that directly engage Indigenous literatures from a (multi)language perspective, and gather approaches that can help develop a framework for the study of the multilingual corpus of Indigenous literatures.<sup>1</sup>

I understand and use the term "Indigenous literatures" fairly broadly to refer to a large body of oral and written texts, encompassing legends, myths, (transcribed) oratory, storytelling, fiction, creative non-fiction, auto/biography, poetry, and drama. As Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice writes, "[l]iterature as a category is about what's important to a culture, the stories that are privileged and honoured, the narratives that people – often those in power, but also those resisting that power – believe to be central to their understanding of the world and their place in relation to it" (20). Justice's recognition of power reminds us that definitions of 'literature' have often been colonially imposed and focused on written

---

<sup>1</sup> This review article is influenced by my position as a settler scholar – I'm originally from the Netherlands and now live in Treaty 6 territory and Region 4 Métis Nation – and reflects my personal research journey – from reading my first Indigenous novel, Naomi Fontaine's *Kuessipan*, in a course on Quebecois literature at Radboud University in the Netherlands to my current PhD research at the University of Alberta about language use in Indigenous women's poetry.

texts.<sup>2</sup> Arguing that a literature consists of stories and narratives that convey Indigenous peoples' understanding of the world, their understanding of reality and their place in it, he affirms that Indigenous peoples have distinct literatures and that Indigenous literatures matter: "Indigenous literatures matter because *Indigenous people matter*" (211, emphasis in original). Since various Indigenous communities hold different understandings of the world, it is appropriate to refer to Indigenous literatures in the plural. The plural noun affirms Indigenous literatures as a distinct, substantial body of literature all the while acknowledging and respecting the variety of worldviews from/in Indigenous nations, communities, and texts. It opens up space for the inclusion of texts across geographical (colonially imposed) boundaries, across communities and tribal nations, and across languages.<sup>3</sup>

'Multilingual work by Indigenous authors' refers to Indigenous novels, poems, and stories that include multiple languages. This inclusion of multiple languages can take many forms, from Joséphine Bacon's Innu-French bilingual facing-page collections of poetry to Naomi McIlwraith's alternating Cree and English, to Tenille Campbell's inclusion of words and phrases in Dene and Cree in predominantly English poems, to echoes of Innu rhythms in Kanapé Fontaine's work.<sup>4</sup> This variety is explained by colonial language policies and their attempted eradication of Indigenous languages and imposition of the colonial languages, French and English. Colonial and Indigenous languages do not hold equal 'status' or power in what we now call Canada. Multilingualism in Indigenous literatures is thus often a direct result of colonization and colonialism. In approaching Indigenous literatures at the crossroads of languages it is thus essential for critics and teachers of these stories to be attentive to these colonial impacts and to the complicated relations between Indigenous and colonial languages in Indigenous literatures.

This article begins with a comprehensive, but non-exhaustive overview of the development of the study of Indigenous literatures across languages focusing on the French-English divide in Canada and situated in a larger context of Indigenous languages and their relations to colonial languages in Turtle Island. Next, I discuss several critical discourses that researchers and students – in particular, those new to the field – can turn to for approaching Indigenous literatures cross-lingually. First, a focus on questions of language includes the centrality and revitalization of Indigenous languages and Indigenous authors' use or manipulation of English and French in Canada and Turtle Island. Second, reading Indigenous literatures as theories and critical work contributes to overcoming the perceived lack of critical work by Indigenous scholars in French and to connecting critical work across languages. Third, the notions of comparison, kinship, trans-Indigeneity, and relationality are aimed at centring the works and the contexts – including the diverse and complex linguistic contexts – from which they grow in relation to one another. This piece thus serves as an introduction to the field of Indigenous literatures across languages in Canada and is

---

<sup>2</sup> While I occasionally refer to Indigenous oral storytelling throughout the article, most examples I have included come from written literature, since, as a settler, I have limited experience with oral storytelling. For more about Indigenous oral storytelling, see, for example, Archibald's *Indigenous Storywork*.

<sup>3</sup> Indigenous literatures thus stretch across nation states and even continents. In the broadest sense of the term, it includes fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, drama, storytelling (among others) from Turtle Island, Latin America, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, the Pacific as well as from Europe (e.g., Sapmi). In this article, I focus mostly on Indigenous literatures in Canada and Turtle Island.

<sup>4</sup> Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, in a 2016 panel discussion about reciprocity with Lianne Moyes and Rodney St-Eloi, recounts how members of her community have shared with her that they can hear traces of the rhythms and syntactic patterns of Innu in her work (Saint-Éloi et al.).

connected to the broader context of Turtle Island, for scholars, teachers, and students who are new to or just entering into the field. Also, those who read, study, and teach in other (adjacent) fields and wish to include Indigenous literatures across languages in their teaching and/or research will find key debates, ideas, and resources around Indigenous literary studies across languages in this article to help them think about critical issues (e.g., teachers of Quebecois, Francophone, or comparative literature wanting to include Indigenous authors). Thus, in this article, I draw from and build on existing work from both scholars and writers to offer valuable tools to students, teachers, and researchers interested in the field of Indigenous literary studies at the crossroads of languages.<sup>5</sup>

## INDIGENOUS LITERATURES AND THEIR STUDY ACROSS LANGUAGES: AN OVERVIEW

Imagining linguistic constellations on these lands we now call Canada entails cross-lingual work in multiple directions: translation – literary and academic – of texts and ideas between French, English and several Indigenous languages; revitalization of Indigenous languages and making space for relations between them; critique of the violence of colonial languages; manipulation of colonial languages by Indigenous authors; analysis of the complex power imbalance between colonial and Indigenous languages; analysis of how all these languages relate to and grapple with one another; and analysis of how these and other possible directions intertwine.

In Canada, Indigenous literatures in French have a long history yet occupy a particular place in an Anglo-dominated literary space. The history of Indigenous literatures in French includes the francophone Indigenous literary production in Quebec and the small, but critical, francophone Métis literary production in what is now Western Canada. From the early 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Métis authors writing in French included Pierre Falcon, Louis Riel, Alexandre de Laronde, and Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine – and Métis oral tradition goes further back.<sup>6</sup> Thus, although the majority of contemporary scholarship around Indigenous literatures in French focuses on the Indigenous literary production in Quebec, not all Indigenous literary production in French is linked to Québec.<sup>7</sup> In this article, I will focus on literary production across languages and Indigenous literary studies taking on cross-lingual work mainly from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With regards to franco-Indigenous writing, while alluding to the franco-Métis literary production and the unique position of Michif as language(s) at certain points throughout the article, I will concentrate on Indigenous literatures in French and its study in Quebec that emerged in the

---

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the article, I will at times use an inclusive ‘we’ that includes the author, the reader, and the broader group of scholars, teachers, and students in the field of Indigenous literatures at the crossroads of languages. My use of the inclusive ‘we’ reflects the article’s underlying purpose to invite people into this growing field. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out that a ‘we’ can also be too inclusive; in ILS, settler and Indigenous scholars and teachers have different responsibilities, as I address in more detail below.

<sup>6</sup> See Léveillé’s *Anthologie de la poésie franco-Manitobaine*.

<sup>7</sup> This little known but important larger history of Indigenous literary production in French, notably by Métis writers in Western Canada, merits recognition and attention. Léveillé’s *Anthologie de la poésie franco-Manitobaine* includes writing from Pierre Falcon, Louis Riel, Alexandre de Laronde, and Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine, and provides a critical introduction to their literary production. Pamela Sing has also written on franco-Métis ‘literary’ production arguing for a broad understanding of the literary to include the oral storytelling and songs by the franco-Métis. See “Production ‘littéraire’ franco-métisse: parlers ancestraux et avatars” and “Intersections of Memory, Ancestral Language, and Imagination; or, the Textual Production of Michif Voices as Cultural Weaponry.”

mid-20<sup>th</sup> century since cross-lingual work has grown significantly since then – especially between Indigenous literatures in French and English.

Language-focused work, of course, also exists in other linguistic and geographical contexts,<sup>8</sup> but the production and recent surge of Indigenous literatures in the province of Québec, mostly in French but also in English (and various Indigenous languages), complicates and enriches the linguistic variety found in Indigenous literatures across Canada and Turtle Island more broadly. Early works on language include Kiowa author Scott Momaday's "The Man Made of Words" (1970) in which he situates language as a powerful element of existence and being a tool of survivance (18-19); Pueblo of Acoma writer Simon Ortiz's "Towards a National Indian Literature" (1981) in which he asserts that although many Indigenous peoples have come to speak one of the colonial languages, this does not impact their authenticity; Cree writer and playwright Tomson Highway's "On Native Mythology" (1987) in which he discusses the challenges of using English – and not Cree – to (re)present Cree culture and spirituality;<sup>9</sup> Anishinaabe author, storyteller and educator Basil Johnston's "One Generation from Extinction" (1990) in which he addresses the situation facing Indigenous languages in Canada, discusses the colonial policy of "English only" as an effective tool of cultural genocide, and urges the government to finance Indigenous language initiatives as a solution to prevent many Indigenous languages from disappearing; and Métis author Maria Campbell's "Strategies for Survival" (1991) in which she talks about how the manipulation of English worked as a tool of liberation for her.

Although attention was given to questions of language by Indigenous writers and scholars working mostly in an anglophone context early on, Indigenous work in French was rarely mentioned in these works – however, some, like Ortiz, do briefly recognize French as a colonial language with impact on Indigenous peoples. Inversely, the first scholars to study Indigenous literatures in French in Quebec acknowledged their relation to their English counterparts. In their definitions of Indigenous literature, they kept space for work in other languages. Settler scholar Diane Boudreau, for example, wrote in 1993: "la littérature amérindienne n'est pas une littérature francophone ou anglophone; elle est plutôt une littérature créée, transmise oralement ou par écrit par des auteurs qui vivent sur le territoire du Québec" (15). In a similar vein, but a decade later, settler scholar Maurizio Gatti (2006) explores Indigenous literature in Quebec as "la production écrite en français par les auteurs amérindiens qui demeurent au Québec, tout en gardant à l'esprit celles produites en anglais et en différentes langues amérindiennes" (18). Although neither includes any Indigenous texts in English in their work, as settler scholar Marie-Eve Bradette points out ("I was" 73) – likely due to the fact that they were trying to identify and carve out space for Indigenous literatures in French in an Anglo-dominated field – their definitions suggest that Indigenous literatures as a whole can and do cross linguistic borders – between colonial languages, English and French, and between Indigenous and colonial languages, as well as between Indigenous languages. To that effect, Anishinaabe author Armand Garnet Ruffo writes that Indigenous literatures can only be understood when read as a whole:

<sup>8</sup> While I focus the discussion on French, English, and various Indigenous languages in Indigenous literatures in Canada, similar language-focused perspectives exist in other contexts such as Latin America, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, and the United States of America. See, for example, the work of Tina Makereti who analyzes the use of Māori language in Indigenous-authored texts written mainly in English in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

<sup>9</sup> Also note his later *A Tale of Monstrous Extravaganza: Imagining Multilingualism* (2015) in which he not only talks about the various languages he knows and how he relates to them, but also celebrates linguistic diversity.

the writing in French and English will not abate; if anything, it will continue to grow, and if scholars want to get the full picture of what is going on in ‘Indian country’, they will have to tap into both sources, French and English (not to mention the Native languages themselves). I would even go so far as to say that to examine only one of these bodies of work is like reading only half a text (or maybe two-thirds). (113)

Ruffo’s call to approach Indigenous literatures as a whole, strikingly, appears in the afterword to the aforementioned 2010 thematic issue of *SCL/ECL* on a comparative approach in Indigenous literary studies. More specifically, this issue aimed to bring together writers and scholars to explore “how linguistic barriers, especially those resulting from residential school experiences and other colonialist attempts to eradicate First Nations languages, affect exchanges between Indigenous artists, whether they work in English, French, or Indigenous languages” (Lacombe et al. 7). The editors stress that they “would like to see an increase in comparative studies, more work by Indigenous scholars who write in French, and better circulation of their research beyond the borders of their languages” (12). Almost ten years after these observations, “[c]e fossé entre les différentes sphères linguistiques demeure lorsqu’il s’agit d’étudier les littératures autochtones sur le territoire que l’on nomme aujourd’hui Canada” (Bradette, “Penser avec”).

That is not to say that connections across languages are non-existent in Indigenous literatures. Quite the contrary, connections between Indigenous literatures in French, English, and various Indigenous languages, exist and are increasing, and, what is more, come from different directions. Scholars provide insights into the power of translation in connecting these corpora and fields (Henzi, “Littératures autochtones et traduction”; Martin; Brouwer, “Surviving”), the place of Indigenous languages as space for transformation and of rethinking what constitutes Indigenous literature (Henzi, “Stratégies de réappropriation”; Lacombe et al.), the theoretical approaches scholars in Indigenous literary studies working in French can turn to (St-Amand; Jeannotte, Lamy, and St-Amand), and ways to challenge the linguistic boundaries within academia<sup>10</sup> (Bradette, “Penser avec,” *Langue(s) en portage*). Beyond academic conversations, the dialogue between Indigenous writers is also enhanced by translators, publishing houses, events, and literary prizes. There is a rapidly growing body of translations of Indigenous literatures in Canada – from French to English and vice versa as well as from and to various Indigenous literatures – which contributes to the circulation of Indigenous literatures across linguistic divides.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, several literary contests and awards bring together writers from across languages around a common theme, notably the Indigenous Voice Awards, established in 2017 by the Indigenous Literary Studies Association (ILSA), which offer awards to emerging and established writers of Indigenous prose and poetry in English, French, and Indigenous languages, and the *Concours littéraire Hannenorak*, in its first edition in 2021, which offers prizes in two categories, “adultes” and “jeunesse” to Indigenous authors from one of the eleven recognized Indigenous nations in Quebec, for work in French,

<sup>10</sup> A particularly striking example is Bradette’s co-lingual introduction to *Post Scriptum*’s thematic issue, “All My Relations. Littératures et épistémologies autochtones comparées,” in which she alternates French and English to signal precisely the gap between languages: “Cette introduction co-langue résulte elle aussi de la volonté de rapprocher les textes et les langues, non pas pour en aplanir les différences qui sont fondamentales et qui concernent la pluralité et la complexité des cultures autochtones sur l’île de la Tortue comme dans le reste du monde, mais plutôt pour que la réflexion académique prenne conscience du fossé qui existe, toujours à l’heure actuelle, entre l’étude des différents corpus, qu’elle en prenne acte dans la matérialité de son énonciation” (Bradette, “Penser avec”).

<sup>11</sup> Please refer to Sarah Henzi’s “littératures autochtones et traduction” and my article “Surviving and Challenging the Colonized Scene of Translation: Innu in Natasha Kanapé Fontaine’s Poetry” for examples of and more details on the translation of Indigenous literatures across Canada.

English, or an Indigenous language. Worth noting too is the Salon du Livre des Premières Nations (SLPN), created by Daniel Sioui and now organized by Wendat author Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui, which brings together authors from across languages.<sup>12</sup>

Although many authors write primarily in English or French – for a number of reasons<sup>13</sup> – others publish in Indigenous languages – accompanied by a translation or not. Inuk writer Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk’s *Sanaaq*, for example, was published in syllabic Inuktitut in 1987 with French and English translations in 2002 and 2014 respectively.<sup>14</sup> Other authors publish dual-language books. Joséphine Bacon (Innu), for example, publishes Innu-French bilingual facing-page collections of poetry. Moreover, the number of dual lingual Indigenous-authored children’s books is fast-growing. Second Story Press in Toronto, Theytus Books in Penticton, and Orca Press in Victoria publish books in English and an Indigenous language. For example, *Kimotinâniwîw Itwêwîna / Stolen Words* by Melanie Florence is in nêhiyawêwin (y-dialect Plains Cree), *Gaawin Gindaaswin Ndaawsii / I Am Not a Number* by Jenny Kay Dupuis and *Nibi Emosaawdang / The Water Walker* by Joanne Robertson are both in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibway), and *Sus Yoo / The Bear’s Medicine* by Clayton Gauthier is in Dakelh. Additionally, Calgary Public Library organized an Indigenous Writers Workshop where participants worked with Richard van Camp (Tłı̨ch̨o Dene) “to create children’s books in their traditional languages” (Calgary Public Library).<sup>15</sup> The number of Indigenous language children’s books has seen a significant rise since Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended that books, and children’s books especially, be published in Indigenous languages, and since the United Nations declared 2019 “the year of Indigenous languages” (David). Beyond Indigenous children’s books, we can also observe an interest to (re)center Indigenous languages in the publishing of Indigenous literatures. Bookland Press publishes Indigenous language books, often alongside their English versions, in their *Modern Indigenous Voices* series (and formerly *Canadian Aboriginal Voices*). David Groulx’s *mâmitonêhta kisêwâtisiwin* is the Cree translation of *Imagine Mercy*, *Tsi Niió:re Enkarakhoténhseke*, the Mohawk translation of January Rogers’s *As Long as the Sun Shines*, and *A Tea in the Tundra / Nipishapui Nete Mushuat* the Innu-English version of the original Innu-French *Un thé dans la toundra / Nipishapui Nete Mushuat* by Joséphine Bacon. Moreover, the University of Regina Press hosts the First Nations Language Readers series, aiming “to publish all 60+ Indigenous languages in Canada” (University of Regina Press) – so far it includes Naskapi, Aaniih/Gros Ventre, Lillooet (Lil’wat), Woods Cree, Blackfoot, Nahkawewin (Saulteaux), and Plains Cree, Woods Cree, and Swampy Cree languages, often accompanied by English translations. The recent re-edition of *Hunter with Harpoon* (originally published in English in 1970 as *Harpoon of the Hunter*) by

<sup>12</sup> While the SLPN takes place in a Quebecois context, first in Wendake and more recently in Quebec City, their 9th edition held in 2020 took place online (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) and saw an increased participation by people from all over Canada and elsewhere, as stated by Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui during the event. Their programming in English likely contributes to this: the 2020 edition hosted for example Joshua Whitehead, Lee Maracle, and Katherena Vermette among others, and the 2021 edition included January Rogers and Darrel J. McLeod.

<sup>13</sup> Some authors choose to write in English or French to reach a wider audience. However, often the language of expression and writing is not much of a choice as many Indigenous writers have been ‘forced’ to speak a colonial language. The colonial language policies – outlined in more detail in this article – have impacted and continue to impact literary expression by Indigenous authors – including in terms of the language of their work.

<sup>14</sup> From another territory, Niviaq Korneliusen published her debut novel *Homo sapienne* in Kalaallisut (Greenlandic) after which she self-translated to Danish. It was then relay-translated into several languages including German, Czech, French, and English (*Last Night in Nuuk*).

<sup>15</sup> To learn more about the participants and their creations, see the library’s website.



Inuk author Markoosie Patsauq, Valerie Henitiuk, and Marc-Antoine Mahieu goes back to the original Inuktitut text to reinform new translations into English and French. The new critical edition contains the story in Inuktitut syllabics and Latin script, translations in French and English, and a study of critical work around the original *Harpoon of the Hunter*. These examples of Indigenous language publishing demonstrate a willingness to (re)center, revitalize and celebrate Indigenous languages and knowledges.

## THE CENTRALITY OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

One possible – and perhaps the most evident – approach to a multilingual corpus of Indigenous literatures is a language-centred one that focuses on language as a theme and/or tool of the texts under study. Such an approach lays bare the violence perpetuated on Indigenous languages by colonial ones, underscores the use and manipulation of colonial languages, affirms the centrality of Indigenous languages, and considers the interconnectedness of languages, thereby contextualizing the impacts of colonization on language use among Indigenous peoples and writers.

In approaching a multilingual corpus of Indigenous texts, it is important to realize that there is a wide variety of fluency in Indigenous languages among Indigenous persons and writers due to colonization.<sup>16</sup> The revitalization of many Indigenous languages is taking place across Canada with local, provincial, and national projects and efforts being developed and carried out by colleges and universities, specific communities, and several Indigenous-led organizations.<sup>17</sup> The revitalization of Indigenous languages can also be observed in Indigenous literatures as numerous authors choose to include words, expressions, and sentences in Indigenous languages in their œuvre, for example, Innu in the œuvres of Natasha Kanapé Fontaine and Joséphine Bacon, Michif in Marilyn Dumont's work, and Cree in Naomi McIlwraith's poetry, to name just a few. This invites scholars and students to consider Indigenous language use and revitalization in Indigenous literatures.<sup>18</sup> Diane Boudreau argues that the revitalization of Indigenous languages is one of the main characteristics of the emergence of Indigenous literature in Quebec conveying the authors' desire to express their cultural and social identity (16). Her related argument that such revitalization is a political choice rather than a literary one seems to me somewhat limited and unproductive: one does not exclude the other. Although for some authors Indigenous writing is inherently

<sup>16</sup> The 2016 census found that 260,550 Indigenous people were able to speak an Indigenous language and conduct a conversation, an increase of 3.1% since 2006. There are more than seventy Indigenous languages being spoken across Canada. Strikingly, the number of Indigenous language speakers is higher than the number of native Indigenous language speakers suggesting that revitalization of these languages is underway, particular among young people (Government of Canada).

<sup>17</sup> The following are only a few examples among a myriad of Indigenous language initiatives. Universities and colleges host several Indigenous language programs, courses, and centres such as Indigenous language revitalization programs at the University of Victoria, the First Nations Languages Program at the University of British Columbia, the Yukon Native Language Centre at Yukon College, and the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI) at the University of Alberta as well as other language courses at the University of Alberta (e.g., Cree) and Queen's University (e.g., Anishinaabemowin), among others. Other organizations that have developed tools to document Indigenous languages and to encourage language learning include First Voices, a platform with tools, applications, and resources for a wide variety of Indigenous languages; LearnMichif, a website created by the Métis Nation of British Columbia and the Metis Youth British Columbia; and Institut Tshakapesh with language education for First Nations people (notably, the *certificat de perfectionnement en transmission d'une langue autochtone*), web-based Innu language resources, as well as educational resource publications.

<sup>18</sup> For examples of such analyses, see for example Neuhaus; and MacFarlane.

political as it affirms Indigenous presence (Justice 21), it does not mean that writing Indigenous literature is *only* political; it means that “[Indigenous people] dance in a politically electrified field most of [their] lives” (Million, “Intense Dreaming” 316). Boudreau’s observation that the revitalization and use of Indigenous languages by Indigenous authors reflects their desire to express their cultural and social identity still holds true. For Joséphine Bacon, for example, her use of Innu comes from within her Innu culture and her Innu-French bilingual collections of poetry seek to transmit Innu knowledge and to celebrate the richness of her culture and language (Bacon and Gill; Bacon). For Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, who is relearning and reclaiming Innu, her use of Innu extends beyond literal manifestations of Innu:

Ma parole dansera avec les sons et les verbes de l’*Innu-aimun* (langue), le langage de l’*Innu Assi* (territoire), la pensée de l’*Innu* (être humain), la puissance de l’*Innu-aitun* (culture). Dans une union presque impossible, valseront les mécanismes intellectuels distincts de chaque langue, au milieu de mes paumes. Ils danseront un *makusham* avec ma mémoire. (Kanapé Fontaine 25)

Bacon and Kanapé Fontaine, among others, thus underscore the individual and collective importance of employing and revitalizing Indigenous languages in their work.

Building on these authors and intellectuals, conceptualizing the interdependence between Indigenous languages and literature is key to a better understanding of the multilingual corpus of Indigenous literatures. Looking at Indigenous languages (and their traces<sup>19</sup>) in these works enables us to see shared and differing cultural elements. The use of Indigenous languages foregrounds Indigenous experience and often centers their interests, moves the linguistic debate beyond one between English and French, and unsettles non-Indigenous readers thus working the “insider/outsider” binary – the quotation marks signalling that in settler colonialism, there are no outsiders among those who live on occupied lands (Eigenbrod; Regan; Tuck and Yang; Dhamoon). This is not to say that Indigenous works written primarily in a colonial language cannot do the same: many authors ‘stuck’ writing in colonial languages manipulate those languages and in doing so foreground Indigenous experience and unsettle non-Indigenous readers as well.

## THE MANIPULATION AND REINVENTION OF COLONIAL LANGUAGES

Colonization with its attack on Indigenous languages and cultures and its imposition of colonial languages and norms has severely impacted the linguistic situation of Indigenous peoples and literatures – and continues to do so. It is estimated that pre-contact around 2200 Indigenous languages were spoken across Turtle Island, with hundreds in Canada (Chansonneuve 11), but the invasion of the British and the French and their languages resulted in the decline of Indigenous languages. Colonial policies were aimed at eliminating Indigenous languages and cultures and assimilating Indigenous peoples into settler society.

---

<sup>19</sup> Even if a text is completely written in a colonial language, there is always a relation to the Indigenous language and/or the epistemologies that lie behind it (Acoose; Kovach). Settler writer and translator Susan Ouriou, in her preface to *Languages of the Land*, notes that “regardless of the fact that the writers in this anthology write in French, the writing is influenced by their Indigenous culture, which in turn is infused with the spirit of the original languages” (8). These authors make their languages and cultures felt in other ways. In that respect, as mentioned above, Natasha Kanapé Fontaine recounts how members of her community have shared with her that they can hear traces of Innu in her work (Saint-Éloi et al.).

The Indian Act forbade First Nations from speaking their ancestral languages and in residential schools Indigenous languages (and cultures) were suppressed. The application of colonial policies through the residential schools amounted to cultural genocide (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 1). Indigenous children in residential schools were often forced to speak English or French and prohibited and – often severely – punished for “speaking Indian” (81). The residential school system disrupted entire families, affected following generations, and resulted in intergenerational trauma among Indigenous peoples in all aspects of life – social, cultural, economic, psychological, and linguistic.<sup>20</sup> In terms of the intergenerational effects of the residential schools on language transmission, many Survivors have shared that, upon their return to their families and communities, they were unable to communicate with them as they did not speak their ancestral language anymore while the people back home often did not speak the English or French that the children had been forced to speak in the schools. As a result, later generations also face(d) language loss since parents who had attended residential school were often unable to raise their children in their Indigenous languages. Harjo (Muscogee/Creek) and Bird (Spokane) add that those who attended residential school were made to believe that their Indigenous language and culture were inferior, and often, even if they could still speak their language, they did not pass their knowledge on to the next generation because of an interiorized sense of inferiority and shame (24). Consequently, this violent language loss impacted the following generations. While for younger generations their relation to English or French is “not as dramatic or transparent as with those earlier generations” (Harjo and Bird 24), they find themselves impoverished because often they do not – or only limitedly – have access to Indigenous languages and culture. The residential schools and the Indian Act thus severely disrupted the transmission of Indigenous languages and violently imposed the colonial languages, English and French.

In this context of continual suppression of Indigenous languages and cultures, the establishment of English and French as the lingua francas, and the forced attempts of Indigenous Peoples’ assimilation into settler society, a distrust of colonial languages among Indigenous peoples comes as no surprise. Although Indigenous authors’ relations to colonial languages are often fraught and impacted by colonial practices, many Indigenous writers have asserted that using, manipulating, and reinventing colonial languages contribute to personal liberation and creative innovations. Maria Campbell, for example, explains that when writing in English, at first, she “found that English manipulated her” (10) even though she was articulate in English. However, she continues, “[o]nce I understood my own rhythms, the language of my people, the history of storytelling, and the responsibility of storytelling, then I was able to manipulate the language. And once I started to be able to manipulate English, I felt that was personal liberation” (10).<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Acoose voices that writing in English is “simultaneously painful and liberating” (12). While, as she argues, English as a colonial language serves to keep the dominant power in place, writing in English provides her with a means to convey Indigenous (women’s) experiences and to counter stereotypes and harmful images. Ortiz, in turn, asserts that Indigenous peoples use colonial languages on their own terms:

---

<sup>20</sup> See the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

<sup>21</sup> Campbell’s reflection on manipulating English for personal liberation is particularly interesting and complicated when we consider that Campbell’s “peoples” languages were multiple. In *Halfbreed*, she writes: “There were three main clans in three settlements. The Arcands were a huge group of ten or twelve brothers with families of anywhere from six to sixteen children each. They were half French, half Cree (...). They spoke French mixed with a little Cree. The St. Denys, Villeneuves, Morrisettes and Cadioux (...) spoke more French than English or Cree (...). The Isbisters, Campbells, and Vandals were (...) a real mixture of Scottish, French, Cree, English and Irish. We spoke a language completely different from the others.” (Campbell, *Halfbreed* 25)

Along with their Native languages, Indian women and men have carried on their lives and their expression through the use of the newer languages, particularly Spanish, French, and English, and they have used these languages on their own terms. This is the crucial item that has to be understood, that it is entirely possible for a people to retain and maintain their lives through the use of any language. (256-7)

Ortiz, Acoose, and Campbell all emphasize English can – and should – be deployed by Indigenous writers and people. For Indigenous writers in Quebec, French, as Canada’s other official and colonial language, is also sometimes met with distrust, and at the same time, being manipulated.<sup>22</sup> Joséphine Bacon, for example, reveals that learning French was both a necessary evil and a tool towards personal liberation: it allowed her to write history from a different perspective than the schoolbooks, and to contribute to spreading her culture (Bacon and Gill 32).

In addition to being a tool of personal liberation, the manipulation and reappropriation of colonial languages can be a conscious political act of resistance and a tool of change and emancipation. Many Indigenous authors write back against colonial languages from within; they “reinvent the enemy’s language” (Harjo and Bird) to underscore Indigenous peoples’ resilience and presence. Harjo and Bird assert that “reinventing the enemy’s language” aids in transforming English and in challenging and contesting the (dominant culture-minority) power structure and constitutes a subversive practice that helps Indigenous people and communities heal. Discussing various strategies used by Indigenous authors to reappropriate French, settler scholar Sarah Henzi, in turn, asserts that it is essential that the reappropriation of the colonizer’s language be done on the author’s own terms. The reappropriation of colonial languages comes from the author’s worldview which makes the ways to renegotiate the language(s) endless. She argues that the reappropriation of language is violent in itself and therefore defeats the initial violence of appropriation carried out in/by the colonizer’s language (Henzi, “Strategies” 84). Across languages, there is thus a need and willingness among Indigenous authors to reinvent and reappropriate the colonial languages, French and English, and to mobilize them for their own purposes.

## READING INDIGENOUS LITERATURES AS THEORIES

Another relevant approach to Indigenous literatures across languages, particularly between English and French, that scholars, teachers, and students can turn to, lies in the concept and practice of reading as theory. Lacombe, McFarlane, and Andrews, St-Amand, and Bradette have all observed a *perceived* lack of Indigenous-authored theoretical work in French. How can we critically engage Indigenous literatures in French when there is little to no Indigenous literary criticism by Indigenous scholars in French available? The answer, it seems to me, is twofold. On the one hand, scholars in Indigenous literary studies in French can turn to Indigenous scholars’ work in English. Settler scholar Isabelle St-Amand, in “Discours critiques pour l’étude critique de la littérature autochtone dans l’espace francophone du Québec,” argues that for the critical study of Indigenous literatures in French and for building a critical body of work in

---

<sup>22</sup> Franco-Métis peoples’ relation to French was often different. Indeed, Michif languages (with its varieties) were born out of Indigenous and colonial languages (e.g., Cree/French and Sauteaux/French). As Marilyn Dumont demonstrates in her poetry, Michif is more than a simple mix and constitutes its own language. She positions the language as “la lawng of double genetic origin.” The emphasis on genetics underscores the rootedness of Michif and contributes to debunking the myth that Michif is only half a language or a lesser variant of French and Cree. Instead, because of its multiple roots, Michif is “pleasure doubled twice the language twice the culture.” It is not “mixed up” but a coherent whole of “FrenchCreeOjibway” (Dumont 16).

French, rather than turning to critical approaches in Quebecois literature, it is better to tap into ILS in English. The translation of such critical work from English to French in part mitigates this perceived gap as well.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, scholars and students in ILS can read Indigenous literatures as theory and knowledge, to engage their work in French as critical thinking and discourse, not only to produce a balance in the sources that contribute to our reflections but also to effectively privilege Indigenous voices in ILS in French (Bradette, *Langue(s) en portage* 25-26). Scholars like Blaeser, Maracle, and Simpson point out that literature too is theory: Kimberly Blaeser (Chippewa), in “Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre,” indeed proposes to read and listen to the “critical methods and voices that seem to arise out of the literature itself (this as opposed to critical approaches applied from an already established critical language or attempt to make literature fit already established genres and categories of meaning)” (232); Sto:lo writer Lee Maracle in “Oratory: Coming to Theory” debunks the Western idea that theory is separate from and should not include story and argues that “*story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people” (87, emphasis in original); in *As We Have Always Done*, Nishnaabeg author, artist, and scholar Leanne Simpson, in turn, explains that knowledge is not created by thinking in and of itself nor in a vacuum without movement and relation, rather knowledge is generated by theory and praxis (21, 56, 151). Guided by Blaeser, Maracle, and Simpson – and many other Indigenous writers and thinkers – scholars in ILS can consider literatures as theories, as knowledges. Reading poems, plays, novels, life writing, etc. as critical discourses provide new ways of seeing literature,<sup>24</sup> reframes the place of Indigenous intellectuals in literary studies, and foregrounds Indigenous literary knowledge in French from within the literatures themselves. Envisioning the creation of knowledge and critical approaches beyond university walls and scientific publications, then, as Bradette also points out, enables us to emphasize the ability of literary thought to produce knowledges from stories that stage not only intellectual but also affective and human processes (*Langue(s) en portage* 26). Reading Indigenous literatures as theories and knowledges – without forgetting its literary features and value – counters the perceived lack of critical discourses in French by Indigenous people. Critical works in French do exist but predominantly beyond traditional academic writing: in poetry, fiction, life writing, essays, and so on (Bradette, *Langue(s) en portage* 25).

This begs the question of *who* can read Indigenous literatures as theories. Is it ethical for settler scholars to do this interpreting and to read Indigenous literatures as theories? There are limits to how much settler scholars can know and access in terms of Indigenous knowledges, stories, and experiences due to their position as ‘outsiders’ – outsiders to Indigenous experiences and stories, not outsiders of settler colonialism. Settler readers and scholars thus have a different responsibility when reading and interpreting Indigenous literatures than Indigenous readers and critics, but a responsibility nonetheless. As Métis scholar Aubrey Jean Hanson writes, “Change can be precipitated by the relationships that form when non-Indigenous people learn from reading Indigenous literatures. When people outside Indigenous

---

<sup>23</sup> The collected volume *Nous sommes des histoires* edited by Marie-Hélène Jeannotte, Jonathan Lamy, and Isabelle St-Amand gathers various key works from Indigenous literary studies in English – most of which are written by Indigenous writers and intellectuals – in French translation by Jean-Pierre Pelletier. To my knowledge, this is the first collected volume of this sort. However, I also notice an increasing number of French translations of Indigenous-authored monographs such as Nishnaabeg author and academic Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s work (translations published by Mémoire d’encrier).

<sup>24</sup> While my focus here is mainly on written literature, oral storytelling too is knowledge, as Lee Maracle, among many others, stresses.

communities work to understand Indigenous stories, they can help to build better ways of being in relationship with Indigenous communities” (19).

## READING INDIGENOUS LITERATURES IN RELATION

Hanson’s vision on how reading Indigenous stories as a non-Indigenous reader contributes to building better relations between settlers and Indigenous peoples and to effecting broad change leads me to emphasize reading Indigenous literatures in relation as another approach for those entering the field of Indigenous literatures across languages. In my continuously developing understanding of the concept, reading in relation is methodological, theoretical, and material, and I believe such a relational approach is important for current and future Indigenous literary studies at the crossroads of languages. Reading in relation is rooted in a deep connection between Indigenous literatures and communities, between text and context (Hanson 19-20) and, in that sense, is linked to Indigenous literary nationalism. In addition to the three aspects of reading in relation described in more detail in this section (methodological, theoretical, and material), reading in relation also involves relationality and kinship as theme and critical lens. Justice argues that relationality is at the heart of many Indigenous texts, and as such constitutes an important critical lens and approach to Indigenous literatures.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of its methodological purpose, reading in relation bears similarities to Chadwick Allen’s concept and practice of trans-Indigenous methodologies. The trans-Indigenous moves beyond the comparative and transnational, both of which are problematic in an Indigenous literary studies context (Bauerkemper; Allen, “A Transnational”; Brouwer, “Comparative”). A trans-Indigenous approach privileges juxtaposition, an approach based on “together (yet) distinct,” over comparison based on “together equal” (Allen, *Trans-Indigenous* xiii). Allen points out that a comparative approach tends to focus on equality and similarities and is thus “easily turned against the political interests of specific individuals, communities, and nations” (xiii). To that extent, comparison risks recentering the dominant culture and nation.<sup>26</sup> Instead, trans-Indigenous methodologies center Indigenous communities and relations; they are “a broad set of emerging practices designed explicitly to privilege reading *across, through, and beyond* tribally and nationally specific Indigenous texts and contexts” (Allen, “Decolonizing” 378, emphasis in original). And, I would add, across, between, and through linguistically specific texts and contexts. Such an approach has the potential to highlight the existing relations not only between Indigenous literatures in French and English, as I have argued elsewhere (Brouwer, “Comparative”), but also, and more importantly, across Indigenous linguistic groups. Reading in relation thus echoes a trans-Indigenous approach that centers “Indigenous-to-Indigenous encounters” (Allen, “A Transnational”) as it reads an idea – or network of ideas – spanning across multiple texts and contexts through language, acknowledging both similarities and differences. In that regard, Bradette describes a shift from comparative to relational reading that focuses on reading relations between texts:

Dès lors, en plus de la pertinence du geste quasi-traductologique qui s’incarne dans l’étude des corpus hors des sphères linguistiques spécifiques, *et vers une approche relationnelle – un terme que je privilégie à celui*

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Justice’s *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* and “Go Away Water!: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative.”

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed analysis of the role of comparative literature in the establishment of European nation states, see Bassnett.

*de comparative ici, dès lors qu'il me semble permettre de ne pas focaliser en priorité sur les différences mais plutôt solliciter une pensée qui traverse les œuvres –, cette pertinence concerne tout autant les approches critiques que la justification du corpus dans cette thèse (23, emphasis added).<sup>27</sup>*

Similar to Allen's trans-Indigenous methodologies, a relational approach is aimed at developing “a version of Indigenous literary studies that locates itself firmly in the specificity of the Indigenous local while remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global” (Allen, *Trans-Indigenous* xix). Allen's trans-Indigenous methodologies, to an extent, resonate with Indigenous literary nationalism's goal to take up the relationship between a text and the community it represents. At the same time, his approach argues for reading Indigenous stories from different communities, contexts, and languages alongside each other, which makes it part of a transnational/trans-Indigenous stream in Indigenous literary studies that emerged in the 2000s.<sup>28</sup>

Reading in relation also involves the reader's – and/or researcher's – relation to the texts. The reader's background, assumptions, norms, values, experiences, and languages of expression all influence the way they approach and receive a text. As researchers and teachers of Indigenous literatures across languages, it is important to situate oneself, and then to continuously improve and evolve this positioning – since one's positionality is not fixed nor static but rather an evolving set of relations – and to ethically engage with the text and the reading process. Although the reader's relation to the text might evolve– from reading the first words to thinking about the book even years later – this relation is always there. Listening to or reading a story comes with responsibility, which looks different for different readers. In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Justice, for example, reflects on the Indigenous reader's responsibility to carry forward the stories and imagined futures offered by ancestors:

Indigenous writers continue to produce work that articulates and even anticipates our potential for transformative change if only we bring to it the best of our imaginative selves. Freedom of love, of desire, of life, culture, and political survival—these are only realized through the linking of our courage to our imaginations. We can't possibly live otherwise until we first *imagine* otherwise. Our literary and literal ancestors made possible the world we now hold in trust. It's our responsibility, for as long as we're given to bear it, to carry their work forward, to help realize their hopes, and to ensure their fears never come to pass. We will have done our job as good ancestors if the world we leave is one more fully alive with the stories of our time and those before if the struggle of those who came before is honoured and shared, if the justice of our fight and the rightness of our relations carry on beyond us (156, emphasis in original).

Storytelling and story listening are thus a relational responsibility. Similarly, Jo-Ann Archibald (Sto:lo) lists responsibility as one of the seven core values of Indigenous storytelling – alongside respect, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (2). Anishinaabe writer and scholar

<sup>27</sup> Bradette is also the coordinator for an academic podcast series for the Salon du Livre des Premières Nations. The title of the podcast, “Lire en relation,” reflects the relational approach set out in her dissertation.

<sup>28</sup> In the United States in particular, Indigenous literary studies developed in streams. The nationalist and hybridist approaches in Indigenous literary studies emerged in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s respectively. Scholars in Indigenous literary nationalism include Craig Womack, Jace Weaver, Robert Warrior, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and Daniel Heath Justice. They argue that Indigenous literary criticism should take up the relationship between a text and the community it represents. The cosmopolitanists or hybridists include Gerald Vizenor and Louis Owens. They argue that Indigenous literary activity cannot be framed as separate, as it always is in relation to Western and other discourses and literatures.

Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair identifies nine possible trajectories for responsible and ethical criticisms of Indigenous literatures for scholars in ILS, including that these “promote dialogic exchanges that include all interested parties, Indigenous or otherwise” (307).<sup>29</sup> While Sinclair centers Indigenous critics of Indigenous literatures, he also argues that “we [Indigenous critics of Indigenous literatures] should invite everyone to the literary feast,” Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike, to share “honest concerns, beliefs, and interpretations of Indigenous literatures for a true dialogue to happen, continue, and grow” (307).

From a settler perspective, Sam McKegney warns non-Indigenous critics of Indigenous literatures against strategically disengaging from Indigenous texts – whether it be by avoiding the subject and research field altogether, focusing inward and moving toward a degree of navel-gazing that focuses on the researcher instead of Indigenous voices, or disqualifying their own analysis by avoiding any kind of authority. Instead, he argues that non-Indigenous researchers should engage ethically with Indigenous texts as an ally:

An ally, in my understanding, is one who acknowledges the limits of her or his knowledge, but neither covers beneath those limits nor uses them as a crutch. An ally recognizes the responsibility to gain knowledge about the cultures and communities whose artistic creations she or he analyzes before entering the critical fray and offering public interpretations. An ally privileges the work of Native scholars, writers, and community members—not as a political gesture, but as a sincere attempt to produce the most effective criticism—yet she or he does not accept their work uncritically; she or he recognizes that healthy skepticism and critical debate are signs of engagement and respect, not dismissal. Further, an ally appreciates that multilayered and ultimately valid understandings of cultures, communities, and histories can never emerge solely from book research and that the ongoing vitality of Indigenous communities must serve to augment and correct what Jana Sequoya calls ‘the alienated forms of archive material’ (458). Most importantly, the non-Native ally acts out of a sense of responsibility to Indigenous communities in general and most pointedly to those whose creative works are under analysis. Cherokee author, academic, and activist Daniel Heath Justice argues that ‘to be a thoughtful participant in the decolonization of Indigenous peoples is to necessarily enter into an ethical relationship that requires respect, attentiveness, intellectual rigour, and no small amount of moral courage’ (9). Allied critical endeavors, it seems to me, aspire to such participation. (McKegney 85)

As “cogenerators of knowledge” (Simpson), stories require the reader to engage ethically with the text as well as with the people since knowledge is created in relation. To teach this relational responsibility of learning, Leanne Simpson tells the story of Nanabush’s journey around the world. Nanabush, the first Nishnaabeg intellectual, “walked the world twice after it was created” (56). Not to “help ‘those less fortunate’” or to see how the land could be used and exploited, but “to understand their place in it, to create face-to-face relationships with other nations and beings because Nanabush understood that the

---

<sup>29</sup> Sinclair’s other eight trajectories for responsible and ethical criticisms of Indigenous literatures comprise recognizing the full humanity of Indigenous peoples (301), situating stories in specific times, places, and contexts (302), respectfully considering Indigenous-centred literary approaches as fruitful possibilities (303), recognizing and legitimizing Indigenous intellectual history (303), being responsible to an audience of Indigenous peoples (305), avoiding a deficit model of change and of situating Indigenous peoples in the past (305), “dream[ing] of (and point[ing] to) important new possibilities for literary criticisms of Indigenous writing, as well as leav[ing] space for the reader to dream of (and point to) possibilities too” (306), and “provoke[ing], evok[ing], and invoke[ing] change, growth, and beauty that are understandable by many, even if devised by few” (307).



Nishnaabeg, that we all, are linked to all of creation in a global community” (57). Simpson continues the story:

when Nanabush returned from their journey and visited with Gzhwe Manidoo, Gzhwe Manidoo listened to what they had experienced and sent them around the world one more time, this time with Ma’ingan, wolf, as a companion. This to me points to the relational nature of our knowledge – the journey changes with a companion, and the methodology is relational. The second journey with the wolf forged a different, but related, set of relationships. One’s experience of the world, of knowledge, or of learning is profoundly contextual, and the body of knowledge generated the second time is different from the first (57-58).

In a field that has traditionally involved predominantly individual research and has often forgotten and ignored the relational nature of learning and knowledge, more research in ILS has become relational and collaborative. Here too, the roles of an Indigenous scholar and a settler scholar will be different, but the purpose remains the same: engaging with Indigenous stories can help create better relations and affect change. Mirroring the collaborative trends in the creation of Indigenous literatures,<sup>30</sup> collaborative and/or community-based projects in ILS include translations in collaboration with the author (such as the aforementioned *Hunter with Harpoon*) and “writing-in-relation” and interviews with Indigenous authors about their work (see Hanson), to name just a few examples. The “researcher-in-relation” is expected to be respectful and relational towards those involved with the research (including research participants, collaborators, and authors), engaged ethically with Indigenous texts, knowledge systems, people, and communities, and self-aware of their cultural grounding and motivations that influence the research.

Reading in relation also involves Indigenous literature’s relation to the world and in researching and teaching Indigenous literatures across languages, it is important to remember, acknowledge, and engage this real relation between story and the world. For Indigenous peoples, it is clear that storytelling and literature are deeply rooted within reality and have an impact on it. Indigenous literatures have concrete applications “as [they] move outside the boundaries of a text to affect the material world” (Episkenew 193). Craig Womack (Creek/Cherokee) for example emphasizes the “intrinsic and extrinsic relationship” between Indigenous communities and Indigenous writing, while Jace Weaver highlights the “dialogic” nature of Indigenous texts as they “both reflect and shape Native identity and community” (qtd in McKegney 80). In that respect, Justice’s “good stories” tell “the truths of our presence in the world today, in days past, and in days to come” (2) and are good precisely because of their applications: they teach us to be human, to be good relatives, and to live well.

Indigenous literatures affirm that Indigenous histories are more than suffering (Justice; Ortiz); they counter the Canadian myth and colonialism (Acoose; Million; Justice; Episkenew); they affirm and represent cultural continuity (Acoose; LaRocque); they establish, maintain, and rebuild connections and community (Weaver; Brooks; Justice); they instruct, affect, persuade, and influence the reader (Acoose); they can create social change and alternative ways of being in the world (Justice); they bring about healing (Episkenew); they imagine Indigenous futures (Justice; Hargreaves); and they encourage

---

<sup>30</sup> Examples of note include *Aimititau ! Parlons nous !*, edited by Laura Morali, which brings together Indigenous and Quebecois authors through epistolary and creative correspondences; non-fictional epistolary correspondences written in collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors, such as *Kuei, je te salue* by Deni Ellis Béchard and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, and *La bienveillance des ours* by François Lévesque and Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau; as well as multi-authored collections of short stories, such as *Wapke* edited by Michel Jean and the graphic novel *This Place: 150 Years Retold*.

decolonization (Hargreaves; Acoose). Justice argues that story “makes meaning of the relationships that define who we are and what our place is in the world” (75). Indigenous stories remind us of and teach us about the identities and emotions of others; they teach empathy which is built from imagination and is necessary for kinship. Stories are also ways of writing back against colonial forces and narratives and affirming alternative and transformative ways of being. In short, “relationships are storied” and stories “remind us of our connections to one another, human and other-than-human alike” and help us “maintain, rebuild, or even simply establish these meaningful connections” across languages (Justice 74, 87, xix).

This article brought together multiple theories and approaches researchers and students can turn to for exploring Indigenous literatures at the crossroads of languages. Language-focused approaches, addressing Indigenous languages and/or colonial languages such as French and English, and their workings continue to grow. As language as a site of culture continues to evolve and as Indigenous languages revitalization advances, future analyses and considerations of language questions in Indigenous literatures will contribute to critiquing and dismantling colonial structures and thought on the one hand, and affirming and celebrating Indigenous presence, resilience, and resurgence on the other. Reading as theory and reading in relation appear as two ethical approaches to cross-lingual Indigenous literary studies. Reading as theory serves to overcome the perceived gap of theory produced by Indigenous authors and intellectuals in French and, even more importantly, serves to ethically engage with texts by affirming Indigenous writing and stories as valuable knowledge creation. Reading in relation, in turn, helps us situate texts in a specific context while remaining aware of a larger context of relations as well as to think through our responsibilities as Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and students towards the texts we read and the stories we hear. With regards to reading in relation, one important question remains: in a context of traditionally primarily individual interpretation and research, how can we as scholars and teachers in ILS across languages engage ethically with Indigenous people and communities from where these stories are born? As the aforementioned current collaborations predict, the future of Indigenous literary studies at the crossroads of languages will remain attentive to this question and continue to actively seek out collaborative and/or community-based endeavours. In that spirit, this article also serves as an invitation to imagine together exciting ways that Indigenous literary studies across languages might go and to keep the conversations in the field going as we grapple with important questions: If language is a site of culture, power, and story, what role can/does it play in decolonization? How can perspectives from different linguistic contexts challenge, grapple with, and ultimately enrich each other? As Indigenous language revitalization advances, how will this impact and appear in Indigenous literatures and their study? What are the responsibilities of those scholars, teachers, and students of Indigenous literatures across languages who can work in multiple languages and linguistic contexts in developing the field, in building relations with Indigenous peoples, and affecting change across languages?

## WORKS CITED

- Acoose, Janice. *Iskwewak--Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws*. Women's Press, 1995.
- Allen, Chadwick. "A Transnational Native American Studies? Why Not Studies That Are Trans-Indigenous?" *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2012. DOI: 10.5070/T841007097.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Decolonizing Comparison: Toward a Trans-Indigenous Literary Studies." *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 377–94.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
- Archibald, Jo-Ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. University of British Columbia Press, 2008.
- Bacon, Joséphine. *Bâtons à message: Tshissinuatshitakana*. Mémoire d'encrier, 2009.
- Bacon, Joséphine, and Pierre Gill. "Interview: Joséphine Bacon, Poétesse Innue et Femme de Cœur." *Premières Nations*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2009, pp. 30–34.
- Bassnett, Susan. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Blackwell, 1993.
- Bauerkemper, Joseph. "Indigenous Trans/Nationalism and the Ethics of Theory in Native Literary Studies." *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 395–408.
- Blaeser, Kimberley. "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre." *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016, pp. 231–38.
- Boudreau, Diane. *Histoire de la littérature amérindienne au Québec: Oralité et écriture*. L'Hexagone, 1993.
- Bradette, Marie-Eve. "« I was the low girl on the totem pole » : restituer *Geniesh : An Indian Girlhood* de Jane (Willis) Pachano à l'histoire des littératures autochtones au Québec." *Voix plurielles*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2022, pp. 69–90. DOI : 10.26522/vp.v18i2.3523.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Langue(s) en portage: Résurgences et épistémologies du langage dans les littératures Autochtones contemporaines*. University of Montreal, 2020, [https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/24787/Marie\\_Eve\\_Bradette\\_2020\\_these.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/24787/Marie_Eve_Bradette_2020_these.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Penser avec les littératures autochtones entre comparaisons et relations / Between Comparisons and Relations: Thinking with Indigenous Literatures. A co-lingual introduction/Une introduction co-lingue." *Post-Scriptum*, no. 27, 2019, <https://post-scriptum.org/parutions/all-my-relations/>.

- Brooks, Lisa. "Afterword: At the Gathering Place." *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, edited by Jace Weaver et al., University of New Mexico Press, 2006, pp. 225–52.
- Brouwer, Malou. "Comparative Indigenous Literature: Bridging the Gap between Francophone and Anglophone Indigenous Literatures." *Post-Scriptum*, no. 27, Dec. 2019, <https://post-scriptum.org/27-02-comparative-indigenous-literature/>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Le corps comme zone de contact : l'érotique et la souveraineté dans l'œuvre de Natasha Kanapé Fontaine." *RELIEF – Revue électronique de la langue française*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2017, p. 84–102. DOI : 10.18352/relief.974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Surviving and Challenging the Colonized Scene of Translation: Innu in Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's Poetry." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 33, no. 3–4, 2021, pp. 53–75. DOI: 10.1353/ail.2021.0009.
- Calgary Public Library. Treaty 7 Language Books. <https://calgarylibrary.ca/connect/indigenous-services/treaty-7-language-books/>. Accessed 24 June 2022.
- Campbell, Maria. "Strategies for Survival." *Give Back: First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice*, Gallerie Publ, 1992, pp. 5–14.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Halfbreed*. McClelland and Stewart, 1979 [1973].
- Campbell, Tenille K. *Nedí Nezy: Good Medicine: Poems*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2021.
- Chansonneuve, Deborah. *Reclaiming Connections: Understanding Residential School Trauma Among Aboriginal People*. 2005.
- David, Tahieròn:iohte Dan. "Turning the Page: Indigenous Languages and Children's Books." *Montreal Review of Books*, <https://mtlreviewofbooks.ca/reviews/turning-the-page-indigenous-languages-and-childrens-books/>. Accessed 10 Apr. 2022.
- Dhamoon, Rita. "A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-Racism." *Feral Feminism*, no. 4, 2015, pp. 20–37.
- Dumont, Marilyn. *The Pemmican Eaters*. ECW Press, 2015.
- Eigenbrod, Renate. *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*. University of Manitoba Press, 2005.
- Episkenew, Jo-Ann. *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing*. University of Manitoba press, 2009.
- Gatti, Maurizio. *Être écrivain amérindien au Québec: Indianité et création littéraire*. Hurtubise HMH, 2006.
- Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. "Census in Brief: The Aboriginal Languages of First Nations People, Métis and Inuit." 25 Oct. 2017, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016022/98-200-x2016022-eng.cfm>.

- Hanson, Aubrey Jean. *Literatures, Communities, and Learning: Conversations with Indigenous Writers*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2020.
- Hargreaves, Allison. *Violence against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017.
- Harjo, Joy, and Gloria Bird, editors. *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America*. Norton, 1998.
- Henzi, Sarah. "Francophone Aboriginal Literature in Quebec." *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 655–74.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Littératures Autochtones et Traduction." *Canadian Literature*, <https://www-canlit-ca.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca>. Accessed 22 June 2022.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Stratégies de réappropriation dans les littératures des Premières Nations." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études En Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2010, pp. 76–94.
- Highway, Tomson. *A Tale of Monstrous Extravagance: Imagining Multilingualism*. University of Alberta Press : Canadian Literature Centre = Centre de littérature canadienne, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On Native Mythology." *Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada*, edited by Armand Garnet Ruffo and Heather Macfarlane, Broadview Press, 2016, pp. 21–4.
- Jeannotte, Marie-Hélène, et al., editors. *Nous sommes des histoires: réflexions sur la littérature autochtone*. Translations by Jean-Pierre Pelletier, Mémoire d'encrier, 2018.
- Johnston, Basil. "One Generation from Extinction." *Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada*, edited by Armand Garnet Ruffo and Heather Macfarlane, Broadview Press, 2016, pp. 25–32.
- Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018.
- Kanapé Fontaine, Natasha. "Ma parole rouge sang." *Relations*, no. 778, 2015, pp. 24–25.
- King, Thomas. *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Kovach, Margaret. *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Lacombe, Michèle, Heather MacFarlane, and Jennifer Andrews. "Indigeneity in Dialogue: Indigenous Literary Expression Across Linguistic Divies: L'autochtonie En Dialogue: L'expression Littéraire Autochtone Au-Delà Des Barrières Linguistiques." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études En Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2010.
- LaRocque, Emma. "Reflections on Cultural Continuity through Aboriginal Women's Writings." *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*, edited by Gail Guthrie Valaskakis et al., University of Manitoba Press, 2009, pp. 151–74.

- Léveillé, J.R. *Anthologie de la poésie franco-Manitobaine*. Les Editions du Blé, 1990.
- Macfarlane, Heather. "Beyond the Divide: The Use of Native Languages in Anglo-and Franco-Indigenous Theatre." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études En Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2010, pp. 95–109.
- Makereti, Tina. "Indigenous Studies: Aotearoa/New Zealand." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2020. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.984.
- Maracle, Lee. *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*. Press Gang Publishers, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Oratory: Coming to Theory." *Give Back: First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice*, Gallerie Publ, 1992, pp. 5–14.
- Martin, Keavy. "Arctic Solitude: Mitiarjuk's Sanaaq and the Politics of Translation in Inuit Literature." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études En Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2010, pp. 13–29.
- McKegney, Sam. "Strategies for Ethical Engagement: An Open Letter Concerning Non-Native Scholars of Native Literatures." *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016, pp. 79–88.
- Million, Dian. "Felt Theory." *American Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2008, pp. 267–72. DOI: 10.1353/aq.0.0005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History." *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2009, pp. 53–76.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Intense Dreaming: Theories, Narratives, and Our Search for Home." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2011, pp. 313–33. DOI: 10.5250/amerindiquar.35.3.0313.
- Momaday, N. Scott. *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages*. St. Martin's Press, 1997.
- Neuhaus, Mareike. *The Decolonizing Poetics of Indigenous Literatures*. University of Regina Press, 2015.
- Ortiz, Simon J. "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism." *MELUS*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1981, p. 7. DOI: 10.2307/467143.
- Ouriou, Susan, and Christelle Morelli, editors. *Languages of Our Land: Indigenous Poems and Stories from Quebec*. Banff Centre Press, 2014.
- Patsauq, Markoosie, Valerie Henitiuk, and Marc-Antoine Mahieu. *Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut / Hunter with Harpoon / Chasseur au harpon*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021.
- Reder, Deanna, and Linda M. Morra, editors. *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*. Broadview Press, 2016.
- Regan, Paulette. *Unsettling the Settler within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. University of British Columbia Press, 2010.

- Ruffo, Armand. "Afterword." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2010, pp. 110–13.
- Saint-Eloi, Rodney, Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, and Lianne Moyes. "Panel Discussion 'Réciprocité et Création Collective.'" CÉRIUM International Graduate Summer School, Université de Montréal, 2016.
- Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
- Sinclair, Niigaanwewidam James. "Responsible and Ethical Criticisms of Indigenous Literatures." *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016, pp. 79–88.
- Sing, Pamela. "Intersections of Memory, Ancestral Language, and Imagination; or, the Textual Production of Michif Voices as Cultural Weaponry." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études En Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2006, pp. 95–115.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Production « littéraire » franco-métisse : parlars ancestraux et avatars." *Francophonies d'Amérique*, no. 15, 2003, pp. 119–40. DOI : 10.7202/1005203ar.
- St-Amand, Isabelle. "Discours critiques pour l'étude de la littérature autochtone dans l'espace francophone du Québec." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études En Littérature Canadienne*, vol.35, no. 2, 2010, pp. 30–52.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. 2015.
- Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012.  
<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>.
- University of Regina Press. "First Nation Language Readers." <https://uofrpress.ca/Series/F/First-Nation-Language-Readers>. Accessed 26 Feb. 2023.
- Weaver, Jace. *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community*. Oxford University Press, 1997.