
Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, eds. *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier, 2016. 485 pp. ISBN: 9781771121859.

<https://www.wlupress.wlu.ca/Books/L/Learn-Teach-Challenge>

In *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, editors Deanna Reder (Cree/Métis) and Linda M. Morra take on the extensive project of assembling a critical introduction to Canadian Indigenous literary studies. Their anthology brings together major figures in North American Indigenous literary criticism such as Janice Acoose (Saulteaux), Emma LaRocque (Métis), Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), and Craig Womack (Creek/Cherokee) while introducing emerging scholars like Niigaanwewidam Sinclair (Anishinaabe), Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee), and Keavy Martin. The anthology offers a rigorous introduction to Indigenous literary studies, with a particular concern for pedagogical interventions providing a jumping-off point for contemporary and ongoing discussions within Indigenous literary, political, and cultural scholarship.

Reder and Morra separate *Learn, Teach, Challenge* into five key approaches that oscillate around the modes of inquiry captured in the book's title. They organize the first of these sections around critical positioning, recognizing the importance of acknowledging one's position in relation to place and Indigenous presence in scholarship and critical movements. Many of the writers in the "Position" section express their investment to communities as scholars, teachers, and thinkers. The selected pieces the importance of articulating the relationship of scholars to their work and their role in academia or literary discourse writ large, as in Janice Acoose's "Iskwewak Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Re-memembering Being to Signifying Female Relations." Acoose weaves her experience as a Nehiowe-Metis and Anishinaabe woman brought to the Cowessess Residential School into her later resistance in university classrooms to dominant settler narratives of Canadian literary history. Through her experience, Acoose found "that literature and books are powerful political tools," encouraging "students to read critically and with an awareness of their own cultural position" (33). As Acoose and the section as a whole remind us, as scholars of Indigenous literature—whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous—we would be well-served to consider our position in relation to the works we are reading and teaching, to the debates we are bringing into our classes, and most importantly to the peoples and places we are thinking and writing about, even from what may seem a textual or historical distance.

The second section, "Imagining Beyond Images and Myths," makes a critical intervention often necessary in non-Indigenous literary survey courses by bringing together several texts that challenge the stereotypical images of Indigenous peoples that came to dominate literary canons. The first essay in the section is the oldest publication in the book: Kanien'kehá:ka writer E. Pauline Johnson's "A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction," in which she makes a call for cultural specificity in the late 19th century that still resonates today. Reder and Morra note the preponderance of critical work that identifies and challenges stereotypes, but they emphasize texts that theorize Indigenous alternatives, such as Gerald Vizenor's seminal "Postindian Warriors," rather than those that simply call out racist images. The section therefore equips students and teachers to move their inquiry into images and myths of Indigeneity beyond simply calling out stereotypes, opening a productive discourse into the ways that Indigenous

writers and thinkers actively resist these images and claim a radical presence in the literary and representational world.

In “Deliberating Indigenous Literary Approaches,” the third section of the anthology, Natalie Knight (Yurok/Diné) distills a set of key questions that have served as the foundation Indigenous literary criticism:

What is the relationship of Indigenous literature to Indigenous politics? What is the relationship between an ethics of reading and writing and a politics of engaging with community? How do we, as Indigenous or non-Indigenous scholars, “‘present ourselves’ to our communities as whole persons” [...] within the economic, political, social, and spiritual realities of settler colonialism? How is our art and criticism accountable, and to whom? And what are some methodologies that do justice to living relationships, history, *and* the future? (222)

Responding to these questions, the section includes debates over the utility of Western philosophical or theoretical frameworks to reading Indigenous literatures, critiques of representing Indigeneity on national or pan-Indigenous terms in scholarship, and approaches to scholarly ethics. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s “Gdi-nweninaa: Our Sound, Our Voice” demonstrates the importance for Indigenous scholars to ground their approaches in the specific teachings of their communities and languages. Simpson shares four Nishnaabeg perspectives “to deepen our understandings of decolonization, assimilation, resistance, and resurgence from within” these perspectives, a process that centers Indigeneity in approaches to scholarly ethics, careful critiques, and conscious engagement with the ideas and stories of others (289).

The spirit of this foundational section carries into the fourth: “Contemporary Concerns,” a section that offers a snapshot of major concerns in First Nations scholarship in its current moment, including reconciliation, appropriately representing narratives of Murdered or Missing Indigenous Women, Indigenous two-spirit and gender studies, and political resurgence. Presenting such a section as “contemporary” immediately raises questions of limitation for the anthology in terms of future movements in the field. Nonetheless, offering such a section and defining it as “contemporary” speaks to the editors’ sense of responsibility to a pedagogical project that models engagement with contemporary issues. As in each of the other sections, “Contemporary Concerns” depicts the ways Indigenous studies is dynamic, more so than many other literary fields: continuously articulating the stakes of Indigenous writing in the 21st century, advancing often radical decolonial projects, and upholding expectations of attending to community responsibly.

The fifth section, “Classroom Considerations,” presents commissioned essays on pedagogy, beginning with the difficult question of whether or not certain texts should be taught at all, which reminds teachers to acknowledge their position and familiarize themselves with protocol in their discourse community and in the communities tied to texts. Other essays in the section engage alternative genre and media possibilities for teaching Indigenous literature and media. Expanding the boundaries of what “counts” as a text in a literary classroom is an ongoing endeavor, one that Reder and Morra attend to but could even more substantively draw out in regards to visual or aural media. As the final section demonstrates, the anthology provides a working foundation

with a set of approaches to teaching and thinking about Indigenous texts, but at no point is it a manual for teaching Indigenous literatures. I see this as an important characteristic of the collection. To presume that there is or should be a prescribed way to teach (beyond recognizing protocol and being aware of one's critical positioning) would contradict the rich debates and diverse perspectives brought together in the collection. Those voices and perspectives *are* the offering; they are the best instruction for thoughtful teachers.

Even so, the editors and contributors open each section with an articulation of their organizing rationale, pointing out key interventions by the scholars and theorists whose work populates the sections. This consideration makes the anthology accessible on multiple levels: those looking for a brief overview of the field can read these introductory overviews and selections from some or all of the sections and come away with important perspectives on scholarly discussions and practices. Those looking to substantively engage the material—such as those designing a course or planning a discussion of Indigenous literary scholarship—will find a deliberate, thorough immersion into prescient perspectives and debates over the last quarter century and beyond. Finally, the anthology stands as a rigorous and very useful introduction to First Nations literary criticism for scholars outside Canada. Such was my encounter with the anthology—as a U.S. based student of Indigenous literatures, I have noticed an absence of Indigenous theory and criticism from north of the U.S.-Canada settler border in the bibliographies that I come across. This anthology opens a door to a field of scholarship that is at once in dialogue with and a part of the discourses more familiar to U.S.-based students.

Given the often overlapping historical, political, and economic issues that Indigenous literary studies on both sides of the U.S./Canada border take up, the anthology brings together voices and perspectives that have seemed separate for far too long. This move serves as a reminder of the long-standing relationships between Indigenous nations on both sides of that interruptive settler border; it therefore makes sense to turn to critical anthologies like *Learn, Teach, Challenge* at a period when the field is turning toward the global. This turn, I found, was absent from this anthology; while some essays make explicit moves toward Indigenous globality, such as Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm's "Erotica, Indigenous Style," the collection itself does not address the emerging field of global Indigenous Studies. As the anthology looks semi-hemispherically at Indigenous literary criticism in its contemporary moment, the next step, in my mind, is to pivot from the hemispheric to the global, a move that will bring these many strong voices and the field into a greater position as a major critical discourse.

In my estimation, however, *Learn, Teach, Challenge* succeeds at perhaps its most pertinent goal: to provide a solid foundation for teachers outside the field of Indigenous studies who wish to include Indigenous literature in their classes. In its organization and contents, the anthology offers specific ethical guidelines and approaches to protocols (not protocols themselves) regarding how, why, and whether certain texts and issues should be approached in a classroom environment. Following Reder and Morra's thoughtful organization and collation, the book is a resource that can help prevent the problems that come from mishandling, misrepresenting, or tokenizing Indigenous texts in literature classrooms. As Reder puts it, Indigenous literature, when approached properly:

might inspire you to search for wisdom and to value humility as you take on the responsibilities involved in making meaning; to integrate contemporary concerns into

your analysis and pedagogy throughout the process, because there is no literature today that is as relevant to general society as that by Indigenous authors (3)

Reder and Morra offer this anthology as a way to facilitate positive representation and inclusion of Indigenous texts and to foster solidarity in university settings that have historically marginalized Indigenous voices. Their offering is a valuable contribution to the field for teachers and students alike, for those extensively familiar with or new to the rich discourses of Indigenous literary studies. For teachers and readers looking to approach Indigenous literatures ethically and productively, *Learn, Teach, Challenge* will make an invaluable resource.

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