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*Aboriginal Writing in Canada  
and the Anthology as Commodity*

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This essay began with my attempt to review the first edition of Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie's *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (1992) — a chronologically arranged "national" survey anthology published by a university press primarily for classroom use. It was a task I never completed for two good reasons (and doubtless several not so good ones). First, I found myself balking at writing a review of an anthology put out by a multinational publishing house if length restrictions meant I could not also list the many anthologies put out by several small presses, two of them Aboriginal-run. (Thus, the list appended to this essay of as many anthologies and literary magazines as I could find that include material by Aboriginal writers working in Canada.) Second, the review got out of control and turned into a paper on the ideological effects of the anthology, particularly the national historical anthology, using Moses and Goldie as its main example. Since it is this essay that you are now reading rather than a review of Moses and Goldie as such, I must add that I do use this anthology (a second edition of which was published in 1998) in my courses and think highly of it for providing a useful overview of important literature with a good bio-bibliographical apparatus and thoughtful introduction. However, I plan here to discuss the implications the use of such an anthology carries with it for First Nations literature.<sup>1</sup>

Insufficient academic attention has been paid to the "book genre": the encyclopedia, the dictionary, the textbook, the coffee table book, the cookbook, the travel guide, the children's picture book, the anthology. These are commodities that flow into and out of bookstores, and readers almost take their conventions for granted. Yet what we take for granted, what seems most "natural," conveys powerful ideological messages. Therefore, the structures and purposes of particular book types and their target markets — connoisseurs,

students, children, middle-class travellers — deserve far more scrutiny than they usually get. As Homi Bhabha points out in “Signs Taken for Wonders,” the “idea of the English book is presented as universally adequate” (105), although clearly it is not. To examine books as commodities, rather than as proofs of national achievement, say, or as maps of social reality, is to highlight their connections to a variety of ideological discourses.

Nationalism affected literary discourse differently in various places, but despite this the historical survey anthology became a standard book form in many parts of the world. With the rise of nationalism, this sort of anthology of the best and most representative literary work became crucial in establishing a particular literature as worthy of regard, and there is a long history of such anthologies of Canadian literature, beginning with E. H. Dewart’s *Selections from Canadian Poets with Occasional Critical and Biographical Notes and an Introductory Essay on Canadian Poetry*, published in Montreal by John Lovell in 1864. Dewart’s introduction reflects beliefs that still operate with great force: “A national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character. It is not merely the record of a country’s mental progress: it is the expression of its intellectual life, the bond of national unity, and the guide of national energy. It may be fairly questioned, whether the whole range of history presents the spectacle of a people firmly united politically, without the subtle but powerful cement of a patriotic literature” (ix).

These beliefs about literature were developed during the Romantic period by critics and philosophers, beginning in Germany and spreading with nationalism across the world.<sup>2</sup> A nation without a literature grounded in a long history was not really a nation, this ideology held, and its power explains the collection of German folk-tales by the brothers Grimm, the Celtic revival in Ireland, Thomas Chatterton’s brilliant and disastrous construction of Ossian, and many other intellectual enterprises, such as the writing of literary histories, the development of nationalist curricula, and the founding of associations, journals, and other institutions devoted to particular national literatures.

A particular kind of anthology, the historical survey that attempts to select the best of a whole literature, including poetry, fiction, drama, and sometimes prose, is exemplified nowadays in North America by the various Norton anthologies, particularly the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (first edition, 1962), which, as the cliché has it, goes from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf. This sort of

anthology is explicitly designed for survey courses in North American English departments. And this sort of anthology does more than demonstrate that a national literature exists: it consolidates a canon. It is arranged by period and by national origin, just like the standard English curriculum — not surprisingly, since it arises from the same historical forces (see Young on Matthew Arnold, whose ideas supported the founding of English as a discipline in Great Britain, the United States, and Canada). Its commodity nature is marked by the ease with which professors can get desk copies and by how quickly it goes into a new edition, which, of course, means secondhand copies of the old edition are no longer saleable. There is no Norton anthology of Canadian literature, but Oxford has a large share of the Canadian teaching-anthology market. The exemplary Canadian survey anthology is the two-volume *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, edited by Donna Bennett and Russell Brown (1983). Another similar anthology, Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman’s *Literature in Canada* (1978), gambled that those teaching Canadian literature in English Canada would want to have French literature in translation included — and lost. Just as nations are supposed to be linguistically homogeneous, so are anthologies. (Further, disciplinary boundaries indirectly enforce ethnic lines; I suspect French departments feared losing students to English, and English-speaking professors felt uneasy about teaching works that were not in the original.) Anthologies, particularly what are sometimes called “teaching anthologies,” have attracted some critical attention in the last few years, mainly in the context of the canon debate.<sup>3</sup> As Lucia Re points out in “(De)Constructing the Canon,” “precisely through its status as an institution, the anthology partakes of the dynamic of the ‘instituting process’ by breaking with a pre-existing order and contributing to the foundation of a new one. In particular, the anthology is one of the fundamental means of forming and transforming the canon: an anthology can in fact reflect, expand, or modify (in more or less radical ways) the existing canon” (585–86). Anthologies, in other words, are connected to the cultural practices of reading and are designed to fit into the conceptual categories used by publishers, booksellers, reviewers, book buyers, and (at least for some anthologies) teachers.

The Moses and Goldie anthology closely resembles the similarly titled *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (1990), edited by Russell Brown, Donna Bennett, and Nathalie Cooke, a one-volume revision of the anthology mentioned earlier (this version presumably designed for the ever-increasing number of half-courses

in the English curriculum). This resemblance triggered my first insight: that these literatures are packaged as parallel commodities by the publisher, Oxford, just as a course I teach at the University of British Columbia, Studies in First Nations Writing, comes right after Studies in Canadian Literature in the calendar. Just as some have seen the "add-on" model of the curriculum as problematic, in that it leaves the old, established courses untouched by new forces such as feminism, postcolonialism, or theory, so this parallel anthology model leaves aside the question of whether literature by First Nations writers is part of Canadian literature or not. It is parallel, implicitly "equal" in the liberal model, but also separate, so we don't have to tackle difficult questions about quality such as "Is Thomas King as good a writer as Timothy Findley?" or, "Does Daniel David Moses write poetry as compelling as Erin Mouré's?"

Barbara Herrnstein Smith has said that "One of the major effects of prohibiting or inhibiting explicit evaluation is to forestall the exhibition and obviate the possible acknowledgement of divergent systems of value and thus to ratify, by default, established evaluative authority" (11). Goldie says in the introduction to his anthology that he "would feel personally a bit of a failure if people thought that [the anthology] therefore establishes what is the best in Native writing, or even establishes what is the best in Native writing in 1992" (xx), but his intentions cannot overturn conventional assumptions about anthologies. That these works have been selected for this anthology implies that they were seen as better than others that were not selected, whatever the editors may say. Quality should be discussed, particularly in courses on Aboriginal literature, where often students assume that this body of writing is inferior because it does not match what they are trained to expect in their other literature courses. As Goldie points out in his article "Fresh Canons: The Native Canadian Example," it is "difficult to see any canon as much more than a series of power relationships" (374), and this issue also needs exploration in any class that uses this anthology. The ways in which the dominant culture establishes its aesthetic assumptions as universal can be explored in many ways — indeed, this essay is an exploration of how the reception of First Nations writing is made problematic by presenting it in the structure of the national historical anthology, a form designed to support alien cultural practices and assumptions.

"Parallel" ethnic anthologies not only separate the "ethnic" from the supposedly "nonethnic" Anglo-Celtic mainstream but also separate writers who are profoundly interconnected in their writing life.

Thus they forestall the discussion of, for example, the influence of Leon Rooke on Thomas King or of Michel Tremblay on Tomson Highway. It is as if Native and non-Native writers live in different worlds, thus supporting the model of us and them, self and other, which racial/ethnic difference is constructed to maintain. Although the publication of new anthologies of minority writing, such as *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (published by Oxford and edited by Smaro Kamboureli), appears to signal inclusion, ethnicity remains in what Kamboureli has called a "quarantined position" ("Canadian Ethnic Anthologies" 13). Nonetheless, as Alan C. Golding notes, their very existence can destabilize the authority of "the canonical teaching text" and prevent it from achieving the hegemony of earlier anthologies whose influence sometimes lasted for decades (303). Anyone putting together a new survey anthology of Canadian literature will certainly begin by looking at anthologies like the one edited by Moses and Goldie.

Constructing Aboriginal writing in Canada as a "national" literature and collecting works only by those who have some Native ancestry does support the claim of Aboriginal peoples to be dealt with as nations with important cultures, rather than as a small population of federal wards whose cultures must necessarily vanish if they are to flourish in a modern world. Despite increasing globalization, the force of the term *First Nations* shows the currency of nationalist beliefs. The essentialism implicit in such terms is also implicit in the selection process of national anthologies although, of course, ethnicity and race have repeatedly been shown to be rather dubious constructs of the same ideology that drives Dewart's message. Anthologies are part of a system — a set of interconnected institutional practices — that construct ethnic and racial identity. Thomas King tackles this complex issue in the introduction to *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*:

[The] definition — on the basis of race — however, makes a rather large assumption. . . . It assumes that the matter of race imparts to the Native writer a tribal understanding of the universe, access to a distinct culture, and a literary perspective that is unattainable by non-Natives. In our discussions of Native literature, we try to imagine that there is a racial denominator which full-bloods raised in cities, half-bloods raised on farms, quarter-bloods raised on reservations, Indians adopted and raised by white families, Indians who speak their

tribal language, Indians who speak only English, traditionally educated Indians, university-trained Indians, Indians with little education, and the like all share. We know, of course, that there is not. We know that this is a romantic, mystical, and in many instances, a self-serving notion that the sheer number of cultural groups in North America, the variety of Native languages, and the varied conditions of the various tribes should immediately belie. (x-xi)

After noting that some non-Native writers may be "more perceptive" about Native culture than Native ones, King goes on to say that his "simple definition that Native literature is literature produced by Natives" will work "providing we resist the temptation to define a Native" (xi).<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, he describes the "demand for authenticity" as a "whip that we get beaten with" and notes that "some people don't see me as an Indian at all," concluding that his identity comes finally from "what I know and feel about myself" and from "the community in which we exist" (interview 2). King points out the problems of anthologies (and identities) based on ancestry without giving up his project to introduce a range of new writers dealing with a particular cultural and sociopolitical experience in Canada.

Some non-Native people have shared this experience, at least to some extent, which might support the inclusion of a writer without Native ancestry in such an anthology. Grey Owl, for example, has claims on being a Native writer, since he lived as a Native, published as a Native, and died as a Native. Of course it was, for him, a lifetime project, and few non-Natives have the persistence for that. However, even Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, one of the strongest critics of what has been called "appropriation of voice," takes such experience into account. In "Stop Stealing Native Stories," she quotes Maria Campbell: "If you want to write our stories then be prepared to live with us." Then Keeshig-Tobias adds her own comment: "And not just for a few months." The piece concludes, "If you want these stories, fight for them. I dare you" (73). Although Goldie and Moses "both agreed" that they didn't want to include non-Native writers, neither goes into much detail as to why. Goldie does raise the issue of Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* as a "Native" text because many "Native undergraduate students . . . believed it to be an empowering book for them" (xxvii). However, given that it is only recently that Native people in Canada have begun to find publishing outlets for their work, the decision to exclude non-Native writers is hardly

surprising. As King says, "most Canadians have only seen Natives through the eyes of non-Native writers" (introduction xi), and thus, King and Moses and Goldie obviously felt it was time mainstream readers were given a different perspective. This matches Arnold Krupat's comment in *The Turn to the Native*: "Thus, for all my insistence that Indian 'experience' is not monolithic, not always and everywhere the same, there is no doubt that Native people have a variety of experiences that differ from (many of) those of non-Native people and that make them more likely to be sensitive, aware, in touch with the experiential dimension of a variety of Native texts in a way that non-Natives (like myself) simply can't be" (10).

Recent shifts in the names used for Native people have rendered the title of this anthology problematic (it was doubtless chosen by the publisher to be parallel to that of the Brown, Bennett, and Cooke anthology), simply because some Aboriginal peoples living in Canada, most notably many of the Mohawk, do not consider themselves Canadian; still others, however willing they are to describe themselves as Canadian, would put it in a way that emphasizes that they are Native first, Canadian second.<sup>5</sup> And, of course, the border is problematic for many First Nations peoples — those whose traditional territory straddles the border, or who were forced from territory in the United States, often as the result of military alliances with the British during the American Revolution or the War of 1812, or those of Native ancestry who are Canadian citizens, but whose Indigenous ancestors lived in territory outside the borders of Canada. It is precisely these sorts of problems with terminology that reveal the provisional and shifting nature of the relation of Indigenous peoples in Canada to the state and the dominant culture. For example, the rubric "Aboriginal" in Canada subsumes many different groups. Indeed, it only became current here after the Constitution Act of 1982 used the expression, stating explicitly that "'aboriginal peoples of Canada' includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada" ("Constitution Act, 1982"). Here the Métis, a group of part-European descent that had long been excluded from even the limited rights and privileges granted to the Inuit and the Indians, are brought into a multiethnic grouping that is produced as equivalent to a nation. That Canada itself is such a multiethnic nation makes the idea of a pan-Aboriginal "national" culture easier to convey.

Indeed, some feel it is almost too easy to convey, and thus anyone teaching from the anthology has to ensure that students understand the cultural variety that underlies it. The main danger of the

pan-Aboriginality inevitably conveyed in the title is that it is easily assimilated into the stereotype of the Indian, a traditional person whose culture is depicted as a mishmash of icons belonging to different groups, such as the totem poles of the West Coast cultures and the tepees and feather headdresses of the Plains cultures. Aboriginal writers often want to preserve the distinctive practices of their cultures and to pass them on to the next generation, and thus are concerned that the differences between Cree and Nuuchah-nulth and Mohawk be preserved, even if all these groups share a similar relation to the state and the dominant culture. But one cannot pretend that contemporary Aboriginal artists and writers work in isolation from each other or from the dominant culture, nor should one see earlier groups as totally isolated from each other, either. As Helen Carr notes, "a segmented view of the different groups of Indians has helped to perpetuate a sense that their culture consists of limited, simple units, and has obscured the existence of traditions and forms of knowledge shared in much the same way as, for example, cultural traditions in Europe and Western Asia" (qtd. in Haig-Brown 98). Attention to these complexities reminds us how seriously flawed the nationalist paradigm has always been, even in Britain, where because *English* is both the name of an ethnic group and of a language, it is possible to teach W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot as the greatest modern English poets (as in a Yeats-Eliot graduate course I once took) without ever discussing what that might mean.

And here the issue of a literary tradition surfaces: Who belongs, and why? The Brown, Bennett, and Cooke anthology begins with an excerpt from Frances Brooke's *History of Emily Montague* (1769), often described as the first Canadian novel (even though Brooke rather gratefully shook the snow of Canada off her feet after only five years in the country). Moses and Goldie begin, however, with a section entitled "Traditional Songs: Inuit" and another entitled "Traditional Orature: Southern First Nations," both taken from anthologies edited by John Robert Colombo, *Poems of the Inuit* (1981) and *Songs of the Indian* (1983). In the note on these pieces, Moses and Goldie are careful to point out that these works were collected after contact (indeed, the Inuit material was all collected in the early twentieth century, mostly by Knud Rasmussen), and that their authenticity cannot be taken for granted since they are "samples of a recording process which comments on both cultures involved" (493). Nonetheless, these pieces come first in the collection, before written material from the nineteenth century, and these "early

versions" are included "to suggest the cultural and aesthetic roots of this collection" (492; emphasis added).

That it seems natural for oral material produced in the twentieth century to precede written material produced earlier in what is otherwise a chronologically ordered collection, implies a great deal about our general assumptions concerning oral poetry. First, these songs and speeches are rendered atemporal, implying that the oral tradition must be static. No matter when they are told, or by whom, they are automatically "early" — if not authentically precontact, at least close. However, the oral tradition does assimilate new material, as the discovery that a myth collected by Diamond Jenness in 1924 and ascribed to the Tsimshian was in fact a retelling of "a French fabliau brought into the Canadian West by early *coureurs de bois*" (Maud 95n1). Harry Robinson tells "White man stories," including "Cat with the Boots On" (*Write It* 282). Further, the speakers of this material are not named, although it is widely agreed that oral storytellers vary in skill (see Kimball for an analysis of the "same" stories by different storytellers). Thus, contemporary oral and literate poets are separated, the former living anonymously in a kind of prehistory, the latter as individuals in the modern world, because of conceptions about the differences between oral and written poetry.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Joel Scherzer and Anthony C. Woodbury, editors of *Native American Discourse*, state that "there is no simple dichotomy between oral and written discourse, between literate and nonliterate societies" (10; see also Fee, "Writing Orality").

That it seems logical to put oral poetry before written also derives from a progressive model of literacy that supports the assumption that so-called literate societies are at a later, more developed stage of communication and, therefore, superior to those labelled "oral." Jacques Derrida's discussion of Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Of Grammatology* is devoted to disputing these assumptions:

If writing is no longer understood in the narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation, it should be possible to say that all societies capable of producing, that is to say of obliterating, their proper names, and of bringing classificatory difference into play, practice writing in general. No reality or concept would therefore correspond to the expression "society without writing." This expression is dependent on ethnocentric oneirism, upon the vulgar, that is to say, ethnocentric, misconception of writing. (109)

The tendency to put oral poetry at the beginning of anthologies also comes from the Romantic nationalist belief that great national literatures require an oral origin, by analogy with the Homeric tradition, which was appropriated as the (constructed) origin of Western civilization by European nations. Indeed, one of the defects of Canadian literature, according to critics, was its lack of this origin. Northrop Frye writes that the emphasis on the conceptual in Canadian literature results from the fact that "the Canadian literary mind, beginning as it did so late in the cultural history of the West, was established on a basis, not of myth, but of history" (347). J. D. Robins (who became head of English at Victoria College, Toronto, in 1938) shares the assumption that the mythic is the best ground for literature in his essay "The Backgrounds of Future Canadian Poetry," published in 1915. He sums up a commonplace belief that myths are "the spontaneous expression of the thought and soul of the individual race," goes on to argue that myths "are more myths of the soil than of the race," and concludes: "If this be so, it only serves as an excellent precedent for embodying in this background the weird and fascinating legends of the soil that are to be found in Canada among our Indians, and whose spirit breathes so strongly and beautifully through the work of Pauline Johnson. Of these we are the sole heirs, and the necessity of preserving them is urgent" (316). There is a lot to analyse in this passage ("our" Indians, for example), and the chilling but commonplace assumption (based on the incredibly high mortality rate among Native peoples around the turn of the century) that Native people would die out, leaving their culture for the salvage anthropologists and the poets.

However, I would like to focus on the assumption that Native oral tales can form, as the notes in Moses and Goldie imply, the roots for later Native written literature or, as Robins implies, the background for Canadian literature more generally. First, this is not just a Canadian literary idea. Herbert Piper comments, in "The Background of Romantic Thought," that nineteenth-century Australian writers believed that "the culture of the inhabitants of Australia who had been longest in contact with the natural surroundings . . . that is the Aborigines, had more relevance for Australians than their European cultural inheritance, and that the Aboriginal's understanding of nature, expressed in his myths, provided a suitable mythology . . . for poets and readers of wholly European descent" (68). Indeed, this belief explains the Jindyworobak group of Australian poets who, in the 1930s and 1940s, published poetry using

Aboriginal motifs. As Lawrence Bourke points out, many early anthologies of Australian and New Zealand literature begin with Aboriginal or Maori pieces. And Mary Austin argues that "American poetry must inevitably take, at some period of its history, the mold of Amerind verse, which is the mold of the American experience shaped by the American environment" (qtd. in Krupat, "Native" 318; see also Carr on Austin). Louis Untermeyer's widely used *American Poetry: From the Beginning to Whitman* (1931) contains a section of American Indian poetry. And this belief affected English literature anthologies too, although clearly their Indigenous peoples were the Anglo-Saxons (and not the Celts!). The Romantic nationalist belief in the need for oral literary origins meant that *Beowulf*, previously the domain of German scholars, was swung into place at the beginning of anthologies of English literature beginning in the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> Yet *Beowulf* can scarcely be said to be written in English, despite the relation of Anglo-Saxon to modern English. First-year students can't read *Beowulf* in the original, but they can struggle through Chaucer, previously the first author in most general English literature anthologies. What the desire for oral origins occluded was the Norman Conquest. In a similar way, to place Aboriginal oral transcriptions at the beginning of anthologies, whether of Native literature or Canadian literature, occludes the conquest that changed the main means of literary production in North America from spoken to written, sung to published.

Canadian anthologists shared the view that Aboriginal writing was important to the Canadian literary tradition. John Reade suggested producing an anthology of Native Canadian poetry to the Royal Society of Canada in 1884 (Clements 184), and Lorne Pierce planned to include an anthology of Native material in his *Makers of Canadian Literature* series, edited by Marius Barbeau, but neither appeared (Fee, "Lorne Pierce" 62). However, several early and important anthologies open with transcribed, translated Native oral material, including Ralph Gustafson's *Anthology of Canadian Poetry (English)* (1942), which begins with two songs from the Haida; A. J. M. Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry: A Critical and Historical Anthology* (1943), which begins with a section titled "Indian Poetry and French Canadian Folk Songs," including Haida and Abenaki material;<sup>8</sup> and Desmond Pacey's *A Book of Canadian Stories* (1947), which includes four "Indian Tales."<sup>9</sup> The point is that national historical anthologies construct a tradition retroactively, implying that the writers at the end have a comprehensive and organic knowledge of the whole

range of work, when, in fact, scarcely any of the writers in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* ever read *Beowulf*, and the writers in Moses and Goldie probably had their first contact with the oral works in it when they got their authors' copies. Dell Hymes says that "the underlying patterns revealed by ethnopoeitics are not available in consciousness, even to those with an uninterrupted heritage" ("Anthologies" 42). The tradition of oral storytelling rarely connects seamlessly with the contemporary written tradition except in anthologies.

As Hymes points out, "Conquest, disruption, conversion, schooling, decimation eliminated most [oral] learning" ("*In Vain*" 6), and so although there are important connections between oral tales and contemporary writers, these are not usually the traditional ones of having a story passed from one teller to the next within a culture. Instead, someone like Thomas King, a part-Cherokee, part-Greek, American-born Canadian, *reads* the transcribed oral stories of Harry Robinson, a Shuswap storyteller, and is inspired (see King, "Godzilla" 14). But what King discovers in oral stories is not content so much as "technical aspects of writing," such as "repetition and the kind of cadences . . . normally only . . . associated with poetry" (interview 5). Moses comments that the mainstream image of "traditional Native storytelling places Native people in the museum with all the other extinct species. We're living now, in this world, and like everyone else we have to deal with mass media, everything from video to paperback books. Of course our ways of expressing ourselves are no longer only oral storytelling" (xx). Again, for Moses as for King, the influence of oral stories has been formal: "the example of traditional Native storytelling, its orality or whatever you would call it, has been for me a freeing thing. The pieces I write look like plays or poems or short stories, but I'm interested in how they sound and how they work when they're spoken" (xx). King and Moses are wary of being too closely identified with the stereotype of the oral, inarticulate, grunting Indian. However, their use of the formal markers of orality is striking. This is particularly so in King's stories, and the move is a recuperative one: King is claiming his right to use this tradition in a new way (see Fee, "Writing Orality").

Further, the singers of the songs and the orators at the beginning of this anthology were speaking in Indigenous languages. Thus, the first pieces are not only transcriptions, but also translations.<sup>10</sup> The difficulties inherent in our assumptions about translation, assumptions that include the idea that words contain a transparent meaning

that can be faithfully rendered in another language without any consideration of power relations or cultural context, have been examined by Tejaswini Niranjana in *Siting Translation*. She notes that "Translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism. What is at stake here is the representation of the colonized, who need to be produced in such a manner as to justify colonial domination, and to beg for the English book by themselves" (2). Moreover, to write oral tales — even when they are, like those of Harry Robinson, told in English — is inevitably to strip them of their performative aspect: gesture, facial expression, audience interaction, and so on.

The point is not that I think that oral material should be excluded from anthologies, but that the difficulties of including it should be recognized and made clear to readers. As William M. Clements points out, there has been a long-standing tendency for collections of "Native American verbal art" (as he calls it) to decontextualize the works as if they could be read by anyone for their "universal" qualities, when, like every work of art, they are tied firmly to a particular culture and its aesthetic. He draws an analogy with the way in which Native material art is displayed in museums and galleries, a mode of presentation that implies that "Westerners don't need to reorient themselves culturally to appreciate the texts" (183). Yet even contemporary oral tales, songs, and speeches are produced outside the art institutions of the West. And a great deal of Native oral and written art differs from mainstream productions of a similar sort because it is often aimed at different audiences and intended to perform different sociopolitical functions. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias edited *Into the Moon* (1996) as a healing project as much as a literary one since it gives the women in it a place to speak of the abuse and prejudice that has shaped their lives. Ron Hamilton (Ki-ke-in) notes that "the Western literary traditions will have to adopt some new forms of writing . . . in order to speed up the approaching understanding so much looked forward to by natives and non-natives alike. I don't want to have to launder my thoughts and bleach my words 'white' in order to have them published" (91).

Without knowledge of cultural differences, the reader will simply read his or her own cultural traditions over the work, obliterating its difference. A similar point is made by Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat in their introduction to *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*. They warn of the "dangers in welcoming Native literatures into classroom discussion or journal debate as though they

were 'just like any other,' just like what 'we' English teachers were familiar with" (1-2). Reading these literatures properly, they argue, involves the interdisciplinary knowledge of language, poetics, and culture produced by linguists, literary critics, and ethnologists working together. Several recent collections have begun to overcome the problem, for example: *Coming to Light: Contemporary Translations of the Native Literatures of North America*, edited by Brian Swann (1994); Julie Cruikshank's *Life Lived like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (1990); Harry Robinson's *Write It on Your Heart* (1989); and *Nature Power* (1992), collected, transcribed, and edited by Wendy Wickwire; the works of Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer on Tlingit verbal art, *Haa Shukù, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives* (1987), *Haa Tuwunáagu Yís, For Healing our Spirit: Tlingit Oratory* (1990), *Haa Kusteeyí, Our Culture: Tlingit Life Stories* (1994); and the "Performances and Texts" section of *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*, edited by Arnold Krupat (1993). The example of such works will make it easier to introduce oral texts into anthologies and the English classroom without simultaneously subjecting them to reductive ethnocentric interpretations.

After the oral pieces, Moses and Goldie include a few letters and speeches written by Joseph Brant (1742-1807), George Copway (1818-69), Catherine Soneegoh Sutton (1822-65), and John Brant-Sero (1867-1914). These are not oral works nor are they literature, strictly speaking, but they do draw attention to the long tradition of prose writing in English by Aboriginal peoples, also foregrounded in Penny Petrone's two anthologies (see anthologies list). Helen Jaskoski, in *Early Native American Writing* (1996), notes that it is commonplace to ignore Native writers who "wrote in European languages, and . . . directed their words to an audience of non-Native people" (xi), and yet this tradition helps to dissolve the ideological binary constructed between illiterate, traditional Native person and literate, contemporary Native person. This is the binary that King attacks in *Green Grass, Running Water*; when Eli Stand Alone is accused of not being a real Indian because he is a university professor of English, he replies that he not only speaks English better than his interlocutor, but "Blackfoot too" (141). It is not an either/or proposition.

This essay's running commentary has been facilitated by a renaissance in oral storytelling and writing by Aboriginal people in North America, as well as a renewed scholarly interest in the whole range

of Native cultural production. So it is not only the advent of new writers that will force a third edition of Moses and Goldie but also the advent of new approaches and attitudes to the material, particularly the oral and early written material. This anthology has forced me to think about a host of issues — just those issues that courses on First Nations writing must raise with students: authenticity, quality, the canon, appropriation, cultural contextualization, translation, transcription, orality, literacy, history. Anthologies, then, make the teaching task both simpler, by providing us with texts and information, and more complex, because their implicit messages must be made explicit and discussed. Lucia Re notes that

The anthology is intended to map out the literary canon of a given period in its entirety, giving the illusion of essential thoroughness and totality and occluding any transgression of its self-established borders. The reading of the anthology replaces the direct exploration of a literary field whose contours are uncomfortably shifting and unstable, thus apparently economizing the reader's energies and simplifying his or her hermeneutic efforts. (587)

Students must be moved from the security of "essential thoroughness" to the sense of the ways a literary field is "uncomfortably shifting and unstable" in order to understand the ways in which culture is constantly broken down and reconstructed.

Perhaps one way to raise these issues in a classroom would be to ask students to find samples of transcribed oral work, of "non-literary writing" (such as a letter or deposition), and of contemporary literary writing to present to the class, commenting on the difficulties of properly contextualizing and understanding them. The entire collection could then become a class resource and a supplement to the "official" anthology.<sup>11</sup> But this is only one way that students can learn to be critically self-conscious of the institution that they are trained in, its pedagogical practices (including the use of anthologies), its curriculum, and its often unquestioned assumptions about the world.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I thank my colleagues Sneja Gunew and Siân Echard for their help.

<sup>2</sup> See Young, chapters 1 through 3, for a useful overview of this history.

<sup>3</sup> See Bourke; Golding; Hymes, "Anthologies"; Johnson; Kamboureli; Lecker; Re.



<sup>4</sup> The whole process of definition requires an essence, and I would argue that this relation between definition and essence is the product of another book type: the standard dictionary. Of necessity, given the size of the English lexicon and the size of a book that can be sold for under thirty dollars, the desk dictionary must isolate the word from its sociopolitical context and create the impression that words contain their meaning, rather than being sites of struggle.

<sup>5</sup> A "recommendation notice" from the Terminology and Language Standardization Board, Public Works, Canada, comments: "because of Indigenous people's interest in self-government, do not use the terms Aboriginal Canadian(s), Native Canadian(s), or Indigenous Canadian(s)." It suggests that "Aboriginal people(s) in Canada" is preferable (Public Works 3).

<sup>6</sup> Moses and Goldie do include dated transcriptions of oral stories by Mary Augusta Tappage and Harry Robinson, which certainly helps to counter the idea that oral poetry cannot be contemporary.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, McClelland and Baugh, eds.; Watt and Munn, eds.

<sup>8</sup> The linking of the Native and the French Canadian here is interesting; both have "folk" cultures, which can be appropriated by Anglo-Celtic immigrants, who presumably have lost the connection to their own folk past through the process of becoming modern, civilized individuals.

<sup>9</sup> Pacey includes a two-page note on these tales, which relies heavily on the ideas of Marius Barbeau and points out that the tales were transcribed from an oral performance and translated. He also warns against "free" adaptations, as they are inauthentic, and gives sources for other such tales.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the difficulties of both, see Maud, and Hymes, "In Vain."

<sup>11</sup> See Warren for this idea in terms of American literature anthologies.

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